



The Baptism of Jesus Christ

Matthew 3:13-17

1. The Purpose of Jesus (verses 13-15)

2. The Pleasure of God (verses 16-17)

Think with me, if you will, of an early morning. Just before the sun comes up. It is still dark. I want you to look in your minds up to the sky. Before the sun arises in the east, the ceiling of the sky is speckled with stars. As the sun begins its ascent, the sky illumines and the dimmer stars begin to fade away. With the passing of the next few moments, more and more stars elude your sight, until there are but a few bright stars in the sky. And then, only one star remains to be outshone by the sun. When the sun rises a little bit more, this morning star can no longer be seen. It is eclipsed by the brightness of the sun. We know that the stars are still there. It is simply that the light emanating from the sun shines so bright that the stars simply cannot compete. All the light that the stars muster pale in insignificance with the light of the sun, which has arisen in the east. Such is the picture of our text this evening.

We are about to witness the rising of the Son of the living God, who's glory is much greater than any other. Even the brightest of all men, who shine greater than all, John the Baptist, of whom Jesus said, "among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11), will be outshone by the glory of Jesus Christ.

Until this time in the earthly life of Jesus, he was kept in relative obscurity. The glory that He possessed was hidden away in a carpenter's home in Nazareth, and few beheld it. For about thirty years (Luke 3:23) Jesus had been a faithful son to His earthly parents. But with His baptism, it is as if the dawn finally arrives. Jesus will go public with His glory and will be clearly identified as the Messiah. Jesus will embark upon His ministry. "The people who were sitting in the darkness [will see] a great light" (Matt. 4:16), as Jesus, the Nazarene, the Son of God, will walk among His own.

Matthew 3:13-17

13. Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan [coming] to John, to be baptized by him.

14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"

15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit [it] at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he *permitted Him.

16 And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, [and] coming upon Him,

17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

1. The Purpose of Jesus (verses 13-15)

In verse 13, we find Jesus arriving "from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him." **This should surprise us.** If you remember anything from the last two weeks, I trust that you remember that John's baptism was a baptism for repentance (verse 11). As people came to John to be baptized, he baptized them as they confessed their sins (verse 6), which was simply a demonstration (i.e. fruit) of their repentance (verse 8). When those came to John without repentance, John refused to baptize them (verse 8). It should surprise us then that Jesus would want to undergo this baptism.

If you know basic Christian doctrine about Jesus, you know that Jesus was the spotless, sinless Lamb of God. This is the overwhelming testimony of Scripture ...

Paul said that Jesus "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The writer to the Hebrews wrote that Jesus was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Peter tells us that Jesus "committed no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22).

The Apostle John wrote, "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

This is basic to Christian doctrine: Jesus Christ was the sinless, God-man who walked upon the earth and became our perfect sacrifice for our sins. So, we are surprised when Jesus comes to ask John to be baptized. Put simply, **John's baptism was for sinners. Jesus wasn't a sinner.** Why, then, would Jesus want to be baptized?

We ought to be encouraged from this text that John was no less surprised than we are. Verse 14, "John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?'" As D. A. Carson wrote, "Earlier John had difficulty baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were not worthy of his baptism. Now [John] has trouble baptizing Jesus because his baptism is not worthy of Jesus" (The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 8, p. 107).

The tense here in the Greek is an imperfect tense, which simply says that John was repeatedly attempting to prevent Jesus from being baptized by him. In my household, it works like this...

My son, SR, is just learning to read.
I have begun to read some books with him every night.
I lay on the bed right next to him, and lift the book up for us to read.
Occasionally, I ask him a question about one of the pictures.
I say, "SR, who is this?"
He says, "I don't know."
Then, I point to a word, which gives the answer.
Often, these tend to be long words.
I say, "SR, what does this say?"
He says, "I don't know."
I say, "SR, can you read this to me?..."
He says, "I can't dad."
I say, "SR, try to read it for me..."
He says, "I can't dad."
I say, "SR, I know you can't read this word, but just try, ..."
He says, "I can't dad."
I say, "SR, I know you can't read this word, and it's OK you can't read this word. I just want you to try, ..."
He says, "I can't dad."
I say, "SR, I know you can't read this word, and it's OK you can't read this word. After you try, I'll read it for you. I just want you to try, to read it."
When he finally gives in, he finds that he can do better than he thought he could.

My son's continual resistance to try to read words that are beyond him are exactly the picture we see here of John the Baptist. John thought that the baptism of Jesus was beyond him. John was repeatedly resisting His requests. Perhaps John said things like the following: "Jesus, I have need to be baptized by You. ... I can't baptize you. ... I have been telling others that it would be an honor for me to take of your smelly sandals. But to baptize you? That's way to high an honor. I cannot do that. ... How about if you baptize me? ... You are the righteous one. I am the sinful one. ... I can't baptize you." That is the sense of these words that Matthew uses. John was repeatedly seeking to thwart Jesus' purpose in coming to him. Because John's baptism was for sinners. Jesus wasn't a sinner.

Notice further that Jesus' request was no accident. It wasn't as if Jesus simply happened to be out for a walk along the Jordan river, on a prayer walk, and came upon a crowd. Upon investing the crowd, Jesus investigated to find that John, His cousin, just happened to be baptizing people in the river. Jesus thought to Himself, "Hey, this would be good for me to do." So, He approached John. This is not the picture of Jesus' request to be baptized.

Jesus' request was no accident. Jesus traveled, as the text says, from Galilee to the Jordan. Mark's gospel clarifies for us that Jesus came from "Nazareth in Galilee" (Mark 1:9). We don't know exactly how far a journey this was (because Galilee was in the north and the Jordan river was in the east, and we don't know how far north or south John was on the river). We can estimate that it took him several days to arrive at where John was baptizing. Furthermore, in verse 13, the language is clear. The infinitive in the sentence gives us John's purpose, "to be baptized." **The entire purpose of Jesus coming to meet John was to be baptized by Him.** It wasn't an accident.

John resisted Jesus' purpose on the grounds that it would be improper for the lesser to baptize the greater. Jesus finally convinced John by saying, (verse 15), "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." The explanations of this verse are legion.

The Gnostics, who lived in the first few centuries, believed that Jesus would fulfill all righteousness by being endowed with the Spirit. They believed that there was a distinction between the true Christ and the human Jesus. During this baptism, Jesus ascended the ranks spiritually, if you will, into a higher level person, because the Spirit of God came upon Him to anoint Him for the ministry. From this point on, he was enabled to live a sinless life. At his death, the Gnostics believed that the Spirit left Him, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). So, that He was no longer Christ, who was sinless and couldn't die, but He became Jesus again, who could die as a common criminal upon the cross. In this case, the fulfilling righteousness is the Spirit which needs to come upon Jesus. To some degree, this is believed by the Jehovah's Witnesses today, that at the baptism of Jesus, the coming of the Spirit upon this man was necessary for Him to live as "the Christ." This is obviously wrong. Jesus was God and Christ from the beginning. He didn't ascend anywhere by receiving of the Spirit at His baptism.

Some say, that Jesus' baptism was to "fulfill all righteousness," in the sense that Jesus had to keep the Old Testament Law fully. The problem with this view is that the law nowhere speaks of needing to be baptized. Baptism was simply a symbol of repentance and cleansing which John had initiated in accordance to the existing Jewish customs of the day.

Some even say that Jesus was baptized to take away original sin. But Jesus took away sin on the cross, not in His baptism.

I believe that the best way to understand Jesus' baptism isn't so much to look in a technical way for some specific reason or result of His baptism, as if Jesus had to do this to merit some favor, or to get some blessing, or to fulfill some detail of the law.

I believe that the best way to understand this is by understanding what is meant by the word, "righteousness." This word is found quite often in the gospel of Matthew, even much more than in the other gospel accounts put together. (Matthew uses this word about 25 times, while Mark, Luke, and John use it about 20 times). Matthew is concerned with communicating what righteousness is and what righteousness is not. **Righteousness simply means, "doing what is right."** You remember back in Matthew 1, when Joseph was described as a "righteous

man," that is, a man who was known for doing what was right (1:19). In Matthew 6:1, Jesus warns of "practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." This isn't only speaking about things of the law, but it is speaking about one's life and religion. Jesus said, be careful about "doing what is right" simply to be noticed by men.

In the baptism of Jesus, I believe that He simply was "doing the right thing." He was baptized, as John Calvin said, "that He might render full obedience to the Father." Not that this was prescribed in the law, but that it was in obedience to what the Father would have Jesus to do. It was the right thing for Jesus to do.

Let me list a few results of His baptism, that demonstrate that it was the right thing to do.

1. Jesus' baptism identified Jesus with John's ministry.

This was important, because John was the forerunner and was pointing to Jesus. For Jesus to have refused John's baptism, would, in effect, have rejected his own testimony that John was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). But to be baptized by John, allowed John to say, "this is the one I have been speaking to you about. Follow this one."

Notice also, in the text the two words, "for us." Jesus said, "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." He was referring to both John and Jesus. This wasn't something just for Jesus to do. This was the righteous thing to do for both John and Jesus. It allowed the forerunner to point to Jesus. That's why it was the right thing to do.

2. Jesus' baptism identified Jesus with His people.

One of the great truths of the life of Jesus Christ is that though He was fully God, He also was fully man. "He took the form of a bond-servant" (Phil. 2:7). He experienced life as a man. We will see next week that He was tempted. As a result of His temptation, He can sympathize with our weaknesses. (That is why we can especially pray to Jesus in the hour of temptation. Because He has experienced life and conquered its temptations.) By His baptism, it was simply another avenue for Him to identify with us who walk in the flesh.

By identifying with us, he left an example for us to follow. The Son of God was not above being baptized. Admitted, His baptism is far different than ours. I have yet to see the heavens open after someone's baptism. Yet, I believe that He was baptized as an example for us. Jesus did live a model life -- one that we should seek to imitate. He modeled for us perfect submission to the Father, and we do well to walk in His steps. In his baptism, Jesus identified with His people and left us an example for us to follow.

3. Jesus' baptism identified Jesus as the Messiah.

After the baptism of Jesus, the spectacular occurred. The heavens opened; the Spirit descended; the voice of the Father rang out, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Thus began the ministry of the Jesus, the Messiah!

This afternoon, my family attended the installation service for a pastor of another church. This anointing of the Spirit after His baptism was a little like an installation service for the Messiah. The world has been notified that Jesus is the Messiah!

Jesus was baptized, because it was the right thing for Him to do. In full obedience of the Father, He obeyed. In His incarnation, Jesus says, "A body You have prepared for Me ... Behold, I have come ... to do Thy will, O God!" (Heb. 10:5,7). This is what Jesus was doing ... the will of the Father! Jesus' actions entirely pleased the Father. Which leads us nicely into our second point this evening, ...

The Pleasure of God (verses 16-17)

Obviously, I take this point from the last phrase in verse 17, when God said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." I want to climax this evening with that thought. Let's work up to it.

We see in verse 16, Matthew recording that Jesus was baptized, and "**went up immediately from the water**" (which, by the way, is a clear reference to His immersion -- he went up from the water).

"And behold, the heavens were opened." We have no idea what this means, other than the fact that there appeared to be a giant rip in the sky. There are a few other passages in the Bible which say this same thing, but they don't give us any other insight into what this means. They all simply say that "the heavens were opened." (See Is. 64:1; Ezek. 1:1; Acts 7:56; Rev. 9:11). The best way to picture this is like curtains in a theatre being pulled back so that you can see the stage. In some sense, the sky peeled back to get a pure sight of heaven itself.

"And he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him." When Matthew said, "he saw," that refers either to Jesus or to John. It isn't clear. But neither does it matter. John testified later that he had seen this occur (John 1:32). According to Mark's gospel, Jesus saw this occur (Mark 1:10).

What did they see? They saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, which pictures ...

... purity -- in that this animal was often sacrificed for the sins of people.

... gentleness -- it wasn't a bird of prey.
... peace -- as it brought back the olive branch to Noah after the danger of the flood.

That's the form the Spirit of God chose as He came upon Jesus. The pure, gentle, peaceful influence of the dove. Such was the life of Jesus. He was pure, gentle and peaceful.

Have you ever asked yourself, "Why did the Spirit come upon Jesus?" The coming of the Spirit was a direct fulfillment of several passages in Isaiah. Listen to one of them: Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners." The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jesus and anointed Him for the ministry which He would soon begin. Jesus, the Christ, was about to embark on a journey in the land of Israel which would last about three years. He would preach the good news to those who were afflicted (we shall see this in weeks and months to come). It was prophesied that the Spirit of the Lord would first come upon Him. Of course the Spirit was going to come upon Him.

"and behold a voice out of the heavens saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'"

Here we see God the Father, expressing His delight in His Son, by means of the Spirit's descent.

If you want to learn about the Trinity, this is a perfect place to come. As the ancients were told, "If you want to learn about the Trinity, go to the Jordan river to see It." We see all three Persons of the Godhead, present. As the ancients were told, "If you want to learn about the Trinity, go to the Jordan river to see It." We see all three Persons of the Godhead, present **at the same time**. There is a false doctrine of the Trinity called Modalism, which teaches that there is only One God, but that He takes on differing forms. God changed Himself into a man while He walked the earth. Jesus had to leave so that God could transform Himself into the Spirit, Who dwells in us at this time. This is sort of like a cosmic Clark Kent, who goes into the telephone booth and transforms Himself. But here, we have Three Persons of the Godhead, expressing Themselves simultaneously: Jesus in the flesh; the Spirit as a dove; and God in voice. This is why we believe in "The Only God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity."

We have here a great picture of the roles of each of the Persons in the Godhead.

1. We have Jesus Christ, who is the focus of redemption.
2. We have the Spirit, who empowers and testifies to Jesus.
3. We have the Father, who affirms His delight in the Son.

I love what Martin Luther said on this verse. He said that we have ...

1. The highest preacher - God. ...
2. Preaching from the highest pulpit - heaven itself. ...
3. Preaching the highest sermon - "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Tonight, we have the opportunity to celebrate the Lord's Supper. As we take that opportunity, we need to focus upon our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. By participating in the Lord's Supper, we "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." We need to focus upon our Lord. There is no better way to focus upon Him than simply to reflect upon the Father's words at the end of this verse, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

This voice boomed out of heaven and testified to Jesus Christ as the One in whom God was ultimately entirely satisfied! Isaiah 42:1 says the same thing, "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." This is describing what took place at the baptism of Jesus! Here we see God the Father, expressing His delight in His Servant, through giving the Spirit. This is exactly the truth of Matthew 3:17. The Spirit has come upon the Servant of God, the Messiah, who was coming to redeem Israel. At Jesus' baptism, God said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." Isaiah quoted the LORD saying, "My chosen one in whom My soul delights."

God has taken great pleasure in His Son. I believe that God has taken much more pleasure in His Son than we have ever thought of.

In eternity past, before any of us were born, before the world was created, God took pleasure in fellowshiping His Son. The Father and the Son shared glory with each other, in perfect harmony, in perfect fellowship. They enjoyed face to face fellowship with each other. John 1:1 describes "face to face" fellowship of the Father and the Son. Additionally, in John 17:5, Jesus speaks about having glory with the Father "before the world began." We know the genuine joy of authentic Christian fellowship. But, the joy and delight of the Father and the Son in eternity past would have far exceeded the greatest fellowship that we ever have with believers.

In ages to come, we know that Jesus Christ will be put on display as the Lamb of God, who is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (Rev. 5:12). The Father has arranged a future marriage for Jesus Christ. Revelation 19 describes the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, when the church will be joined to Jesus Christ and worship Him for all eternity. As the Father of the bride, God will take great pleasure when plan of redemption is accomplished in His Son.

I want to take you to one last text of Scripture tonight that will really put forth the pleasure the Father has in the Son. This may appear to you as a shocking concept, but this is where the ultimate pleasure of God is found in His Son. This is why God can say, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased." Isaiah 53:10-11 says, "But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering. He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result

of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities."

This is talking about the death of Jesus Christ. It says plainly in verse 10, "the LORD was pleased to crush Him!" If you look back at verses 8 and 9, this is obviously talking about the death of the Servant, the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross." Verse 8 says, "... He was cut off out of the land of the living. ..." Verse 9 says, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death. ..." Ultimately, the Father was well-pleased with the Son, because the Son was "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

But you say, "How can the Father be pleased with killing the Son?" The key to answering question is that **God knows the end of the story**. Mothers and fathers, you know about this. There are times when you need to inflict pain upon your child for their own good.

For instance, suppose your child is playing outside and falls on the dirt and scrapes his (or her) knee up pretty badly. You will lovingly take your child to the bathtub to rinse off the dirt, lest it cause an infection. In so doing, you realize that it may be more painful at the moment, than it would be simply to bandage up their scraped knee. But you know, that if not cleaned out, it may hurt more later. You are willing to inflict pain upon your child today for their own good tomorrow.

Another example is that of discipline. When your child acts foolishly, you ought to have a desire to correct your child, because you know the end result of such foolish behavior if it would continue unchecked. You seek use the rod to drive the foolishness from the child and to give the child wisdom. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). You use the rod to impart wisdom into your child. "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to his own way brings shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15). You do this because you love your children. "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (Prov. 13:24). At such times, neither you, nor your child are particularly enjoying the experience. But the child, being trained by discipline will afterwards praise you for it when "it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11).

A child with dirt in a skinned knee will result in infection and more pain later. An undisciplined child will result in great sin for the child and great shame for the mother. Likewise, apart from the death of Jesus Christ, there would be horrible consequences. **Apart from the death of His Son, ...**

- ... There would be no Lamb worthy to open the book at to break its seals! (Rev. 5:2), which means **we would still be in our sins!**

- ... There would be no conquering of death and hell. **We would only await the terrors of judgment.**

- ... **There would be no church**, because there was no blood with which it might be purchased (Acts 20:28).

- ... There would be no display of the "surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us" (Eph. 2:7). **We would only see God's wrath.**

- ... There would be no way to talk ourselves out of judgment, for **the law has closed our mouth under sin** (Rom. 3:19).

- ... There would be no unshakable kingdom to receive, **only a God of consuming fire** (Heb. 12:28,29).

- ... There would be **no hope** after this life. We would be better off simply to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die (Luke 12:19).

Apart from the death of Jesus Christ, these would be realities! Let them sink into your heart. I think that we can often take them for granted. We have a Savior, who has conquered death and hell. We enjoy a church and glory in His grace. We look forward to an unshakable kingdom with hope. Apart from the death of Jesus Christ, we would have a hopeless life. "But the LORD was pleased to crush Him." **Praise the LORD!**

God knew the end of the story. This is why Jesus, "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). This is why Jesus, "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus knew that He came to die a painful and shameful death upon the cross. Jesus also knew that this would accomplish the redemption of many.

This is why Jesus said, "My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:27-28). This is why the Father was pleased to crush the Son. This is why the voice came from heaven saying, "This is my Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." This is the glory of the gospel, that Jesus Christ died to satisfy God!

Sure, it may the Jews who were ultimately responsible for initially arresting Jesus and delivering Him up to the Romans to be crucified. Sure, it may the Romans, who actually put Jesus to death upon the cross. But it was God who was behind it all orchestrating the scene to accomplish all His good pleasure that He might be well-pleased in His Son. Jesus was "delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, did merely what God's hand and purpose predestined to occur (Acts 4:28).

Jesus Christ was sacrificed upon the cross to totally satisfied God's righteous requirements. We all deserve to die and spend an eternity in hell. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). But it was Jesus Christ who died in our place -- His perfect life in exchange for our sinful life. God was satisfied with that substitution. "The LORD was pleased to crush Him." "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

I am here to tell you this evening, that God is fully satisfied in the death of Jesus Christ. You need simply to turn your eyes and look upon Him, in whom God is well-pleased. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "Keep your eye simply on Him; let His death, His sufferings, His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon thy mind; when you wake in the morning look to Him; when thou lie down at night look to Him. Oh! let not you hopes or fears come between thee and Jesus; follow hard after Him, and He will never fail you" (Evening by Evening, March 3). **He is the sun, which outshines the stars.**

Look not to your own works to save you. Look not to your prayers. Look not to your goodness. Look not to your efforts. Jesus Christ is the only One who has fully and completely satisfied God in every way. His birth, His childhood, His ministry, His death, His resurrection -- it all pleased the Father in every way.

"My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness:
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 27, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.