

Matthew 3:13–17

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[0:00] Matthew 3, 13 to 17. Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?

But Jesus answered him, let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he consented. 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. And behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning.

Father, we say with the psalmist, open our eyes, that we may behold the wondrous things in your word.

[1:19] That you would deal bountifully with us, your servants, that we may live and keep your word. And so help us in these next moments, we pray, that you would illumine your word.

That you would impress it upon our hearts. That you would stir up our affections for the Lord Jesus. For his sake, we pray. Amen. Amen. In the United States, approximately 75 days following a presidential election, our country's leaders gather on the western front of the Capitol building. It's the inauguration ceremony of the president. The scene has become iconic. I'm sure you can envision it in your minds. There, America's leadership is arrayed, usually in these dark charcoal, heather coats, wool coats, with the backdrop of the Capitol building. Every major news station is there. The ceremony is comprised of a few elements, most notably the presidential oath.

There is no more iconic picture than the president-elect, right hand held high, left hand resting on the sacred scriptures, and there the president enters, gives, is sworn into office with these words, I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

[2:57] And as the oath closes, they state, I will faithfully discharge the duties of this office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.

After the oath, there is an inaugural address. It's the first public speech where they lay out the vision for the nation.

The aspirations for their term, infamous lines, have emerged from inaugural addresses, and you could fill in the blank. 1933, FDR avowed, the only thing we have to fear is?

Fear itself. 1961, John F. Kennedy declared, and so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

The day is filled with all sorts of elements that point to its significance. Prayers are made, parades are held, recently poems are even recited.

[4:08] The pride of America is on display. Former presidents, military generals, congressional men and women, many other elected officers are all present bearing witness.

It is a testimony to democracy and her success. This sort of inaugural ceremony happens all over the world.

Albeit in monarchies, we call them coronation ceremonies. It is the very ceremony that commences the power, the authority of a civil servant.

I open this way because this morning we see the coronation of a king. We see the inauguration of the infinite.

We see the commencing of the earthly work of heaven's beloved son. It is here that we encounter his first public words.

[5:12] We see it. We could see it as a public oath. It is here that we see some sort of succession from the voice that cried out in the wilderness to the very embodiment of God himself who takes away the sins of the world.

It is here that we see his earthly superiority acknowledged. It is here that we see him receive heaven's commendation. It is here that you see the coronation of King Jesus Christ. I've titled this morning's sermon There's No One Like Jesus. No one like him. He is the superior one. He is the righteous one.

He is the beloved one. There is no one like him. Superior, righteous, and beloved. He is the superior one.

We're resuming a text block beginning in chapter 3 that has unfolded with a baptism ministry and the message of John the Baptist. His ministry is immensely successful.

[6:25] You see it there in chapter 3, verse 5. It encapsulates it all. His ministry is thriving. It says, the Bible tells us, Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him.

We are to envision the masses coming. The region was experiencing a spiritual revival of sorts. Throngs were repenting from their sins and being renewed relationally to God.

Luke's gospel incidentally tells us that John was so influential that the people actually thought John the Baptist was the Messiah. The ministry was so impactful that the elite religious communities coming out of Jerusalem, the Pharisees and Sadducees in particular, wanted to join this ministry and identify with John the Baptist.

And as we have seen, John refused to baptize the Pharisees or the Sadducees because they were hypocrites living duplicitous lives.

The fruit of their lives were inconsistent with the faith that they professed. He pronounces on them a scathing judgment. He would not baptize them because they were of their infidelity to God.

[7:41] They were not worthy. And now verse 13 tells us that along comes Jesus from Galilee to John in the Jordan.

And ironically, John wouldn't baptize Jesus either. The Pharisees and Sadducees desired it. John said no. Jesus comes on the scene, desires it, and John says no.

It's not that Jesus was unworthy of baptism. It was because John was unworthy to baptize. Well, he has already acknowledged that he can't, he cannot even carry Jesus' sandals in verse 11.

He is certainly unworthy to immerse the one for whom he was just a forerunner and a sign. To borrow language from baseball, he, John the Baptist, was the setup man.

Jesus was the closer. How could he summon one from a greater ministry into his inferior, lesser work? How could an inferior baptize a superior?

[9:00] John's words are correct. I need to be baptized by you. And do you now come to me? And regardless of John the Baptist's success, he's acknowledging that Jesus was superior.

Regardless of the significance of John's baptism, he's acknowledging that Jesus' baptism is greater. Regardless of the spiritual might that John the Baptist demonstrated, Jesus was mightier. The task of Jesus would be a superior task to anything and all that preceded it. John understood this. And though he experienced great success in his humility, he now recognized that there was a superior son that had arrived.

In other words, what the Bible is telling us is when you recognize Jesus on the scene, get out of the way. Get out of the way.

John needed to get out of the way. There was one with a more superior work. I wonder if that's a pointed reminder for a lot of us today.

[10:17] That one of perhaps the most visible demonstrations that you understand when Jesus comes as king over your life is you get out of the way.

Well, he is a superior one. Secondly, Matthew wants us to know he is the righteous one. He is the righteous one.

Well, the objection is right there. I can't do it, Jesus. I'm not worthy to baptize you. You should actually baptize me.

But Jesus responds with very strange first words. Let it be so now for it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.

John, you gotta baptize me now because it fulfills all righteousness. Now, this is quite strange because John's baptism was for those who were repenting and confessing their sins.

[11:23] John's baptism, he was receiving those who had faced up to their fallenness, their brokenness, their wayward human condition. They were those who knew that they failed to please God and thought, speech, and deed.

They were the pride-filled, the selfish rebels who displaced God in their lives and now they were coming to John in repentance. They wanted to turn from their sin and turn toward God.

That was what John's baptism was all about. However, the question now arises, why would Jesus then need to be baptized?

Jesus certainly didn't have sins to confess. He certainly didn't have rebellion from which he needed to repent. What do the words mean for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness?

Well, at face value, it seems to mean that for John to baptize Jesus, it was a matter of completing what was right or proper.

[12:33] The word fulfill is laden in the gospel of Matthew. There's a threefold usage in chapter two, fulfilling the prophetic anticipation of the prophets.

The word fulfill carries a sense of actualization, realization, bringing to reality or accomplishing it. It's as if Jesus is saying, I'm bringing righteousness to reality.

I'm bringing righteousness to reality. Now, certainly there is a sense where righteousness conveys this moral obligation of doing what is right or ethical, but here Jesus is actually saying more.

It's more than a moral obligation. Arguably, the most illuminating passage comes toward the end of Matthew. And specifically in Matthew 21, if you have your Bibles, it might be helpful to flip ahead to those chapters.

But Matthew 21, verse 32 is an interesting bit because the religious leaders confront Jesus. And they're rejecting Jesus, actually.

[13:41] And Jesus says, well, you actually didn't accept John the Baptist. And because you didn't accept him, you're certainly not going to accept me. And then he makes this little comment about John's ministry in Matthew 21, verse 32.

He says this, John came to you in the way of righteousness. And you didn't believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him.

See, here, righteousness is not just a moral obligation. It's a way. A lifestyle. It is a life of obedience before God.

It's this rightful orientation before God. It is ultimately in an individual's life conformed to the will of God. What does it mean to live in the righteous way?

It means that my life is conformed to the will of God. To fulfill righteousness is therefore to live rightly in obediently before God.

[14:46] Fulfilling all its moral obligations. We'll see this in a couple weeks, right? When Jesus comes and people are like, oh, are you here to do away with all the prophets and all the law, all the moral requirements?

And Jesus says the same thing. I'm not here to do away with them. I'm actually here to fulfill all of them, to complete all of them. I'm here to bring righteousness to reality.

And as the prophetic word anticipated Jesus, we find here that the righteous law of God necessitated Jesus.

His act of baptism was an act of obedient surrender and submission to his father. Certainly Jesus fulfills all the prophetic promises.

We saw that in chapter two. But he's also fulfilling God's will and this very act of baptism, what he's demonstrating here is God, I am on the scene to complete the plan.

[15:49] The plan that started from eternity past. The plan that will usher in eternity future. I am here to do it. To fulfill it.

I am not going to be a wayward son like the nation. I'm not going to be on a rogue mission to be self-serving. No, I will be the servant son, carrying out the plan of the father.

This baptism identifies Jesus with sinners, with the sinners that he came to save. It's not saying that Jesus was a sinner, he's certainly not, but it shows that he sympathizes and empathizes with the suffering.

His baptism is the ultimate demonstration that he would be with his people. He would be immersed to death for them. He would plummet to the bottom of the waters for them.

He would identify with them because he was and is Emmanuel, God with us. What's interesting is this, as I was exploring baptism, this whole element of washing and being cleansed, water, it's interesting that when God summoned Israel's priests, Aaron and his sons in particular, Exodus 40 notes this, Leviticus 8 notes this, that before they entered their priestly service, their first duty was to watch, as if to say, Jesus, God's ultimate priest, washes as he begins his permanent priestly service.

[17:40] We find here his oath of office. What's your oath, Jesus? I mean, certainly he's not, I solemnly swear, so help me God.

What is his oath? Fulfill righteousness. What is your vision, Jesus? Fulfill righteousness.

What are your aspirations? Establish righteousness. What will your kingdom be like? Your rule? Righteousness. His inaugural address is clear.

I am those, I am for those suffering and sin. I am here to fulfill all righteousness. I am here to demonstrate God to God obedience.

I am here to establish a kingdom of righteousness. He's the righteous one. And lastly, he's the beloved one.

[18:50] he's superior. John acknowledged it. He's righteous. Jesus himself has pledged himself to it. He's beloved.

The scene as Jesus emerges from the water is astounding. Heaven opens. The spirit of God comes down like a dove and rests on him and we have a voice from heaven declaring his sonship.

We need to be cautious here and make it clear that Jesus didn't receive the spirit for the first time here at his baptism nor did he adopt it as a son here. Both views are errant.

It would be safer to say this that when Jesus was baptized all of God showed up. When Jesus was baptized all of God showed up.

Father, Son, and Spirit. Heaven opens up and heaven affirms his identity and his mission. We see it. The Spirit would accompany and empower him.

[19:52] There the Spirit of God descends like a dove and comes to rest on him. The image of a dove resting on him may harken back to creation as the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

It may be reminiscent of the dove that Noah sent out from the ark returning with a branch emblematic of new life. The Spirit whom Jesus would dispense into Christians now comes and rests upon him to never depart.

Accompanied and empowered by the Spirit Jesus is also affirmed by the Father. Now seldom does God speak directly in the Gospels he's really only found speaking on two occasions and he says the same thing.

The Gospel writers all tell us that Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration that the heavens open up and God himself declares the exact same thing this is my son he is my son here you get a sense of a public declaration from heaven this is my beloved son Jesus is God's beloved son his only son whom he loves prior to Matthew for 400 years God said nothing no prophets no divine proclamations it was as if heaven was shut up and silent and now for the first time it is the first word I would say in the new testament Jesus is my beloved son of all the things you need to know the first word

Jesus is my beloved son if you're a student of the Bible then you know very well Hebrews chapter one the final word God's final word what is it he's my beloved son how does God speak his first word is this is my son the last word is this is my son Jesus is God's first word and his last word Jesus is God's beginning and the end and we know very well he is the alpha and the omega if you want to know when heaven opens what does it say Jesus is my beloved son the language of being

a beloved son and a son in which God is well pleased comes from the combination of two texts and since you may be taking notes it's worth writing down Psalm chapter 2 and Isaiah 42 Psalm chapter 2 summarized is

[22:58] God has set a king on his holy hill and that king is his son
Isaiah 42 pronounces declares that there will be God's servant God's
servant on whom his spirit would rest and whom he is well pleased and
here what Matthew the writer does is he fuses them together what you need
to know is God has a beloved son that is king God has a beloved son who is
here to serve and at Jesus baptism you have God's servant king installed
into office accompanied and empowered by the spirit to bring forth
justice and righteousness it is Jesus is coronation service the picture
is clear father son and spirit we're all present all in one accord at the
outset of the human salvation project it would be undeniable that all of

God was all in heaven affirmed Jesus his role have you ever considered this rescue plan that God
fashioned it's a bizarre plan it's bizarre because it involves his most prized possession namely his
son one commentator put it this way for everyone listening certainly the modern reader as well what
God is saying have my priceless son you have my priceless son God did not give us a mere servant
he certainly could have he didn't merely send a heavenly subject angelic being he certainly could
have he did not just send a steward to implement the plan no he took his most valuable his most
priceless his most costly!

his most precious his only he only had one of these it's the rarest of rares right his beloved son why
because it would take nothing less it would demonstrate the value of that which was being acquired
namely the salvation of you and I for God so loved the world that he sent his beloved son the
greatest demonstration of love that you will ever hear that you ever read that you will ever receive is
right here you have my priceless son he is no frugal God God he is not a stingy God he is not a tight
fisted

God this isn't some reluctant divine rescue mission no no no you need to understand that all of
heaven has poured forth all of her resources to redeem the rebel I sent the best to secure the lost
astounding and here we begin the earthly ministry of Jesus oh lest you think lowly of him let me
remind you of this exalted portrait that Matthew has given us up to this point so greater than any
man in history angels appeared to his mother angels appeared to his father the stars somehow
reoriented themselves to direct wise men or kings from the east to find him earthly kings wanted to
dispose of him the

Hebrew prophets were foretelling him he possessed no earthly he possessed an earthly heritage
like no other where are you from Jesus I'm Jesus the Christ son of Abraham father Abraham who
had many sons I'm Jesus the Christ son of David King David who would reign forever yeah I'm not
only the son of Abraham I'm not only the son of David you need to know I'm the son of God I am the
superior one I am the righteous one I am the beloved one there's no one like him no one like Jesus
no one like him and so off he goes crowned as king beginning his public service to save the world
oh father we we thank you for the

[28:56] Lord Jesus oh what a wondrous mystery that you would empty the
storehouses of heaven send your most prized son to redeem a bankrupt
earth and so father may we adore him may we worship him may we embrace
him may we bow down to him may we seize him may we follow him may we exalt
him may we praise him and bless him and testify of him heaven's beloved
son rescuing people like us that in the kindness of God we ourselves are
adopted into his family as sons and daughters brothers and sisters of the
Lord Jesus and it's in his name we pray amen