

The Baptism of Jesus

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Date: 08 March 2026

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[0 : 00] That was quite the run-up, introducing John the Baptist. Life and prayer and love for God, our Heavenly Father.

And this morning, I want to walk through these themes in three movements, reflecting on what this means for us today. And we begin with the baptism of Jesus and his identification with sinners. The account of Luke, as I said, is brief. He simply tells us in verse 21, when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.

And that's all Luke has to say about that. No details mentioned here about any kind of hesitation on the part of John the Baptist. No dialogue, really.

No description of the Jordan River. We could have thrown something like that in. Just that passing phrase. But I think for Luke, that brevity is intentional.

[1 : 26] Because Luke wants to focus on one thing and one thing only. That Jesus was baptized with the people. He joined that crowd of sinners who were confessing and repenting and seeking forgiveness.

And I want you to take a moment to think about that. Why would Jesus, the sinless son of God, submit to a baptism that was explicitly intended for sinners?

He had no sins to confess. He had no guilt to wash away. And yet, he steps into that water anyway. Now, the other gospels give us a little bit more detail.

Matthew, for instance, records John the Baptist protesting against him baptizing Jesus. Mark and John highlight the Holy Spirit a little bit more, with a little bit more explanation descending on the scene.

But the emphasis of Luke in its brevity is clear. Jesus identifies himself with us in our need.

[2 : 40] Jesus identifies himself with us in our need. And that, I think, is profound and important. Because after all, the people were coming to John the Baptist because they knew they were guilty.

Right? And their baptism was kind of a public acknowledgement that, hey, I'm a sinner. And I need cleansing. And I need forgiveness. And Jesus, who had no sin, joins them.

He doesn't stand apart, kind of just watching the scene. He gets right in line with them. He goes down into the water.

And he receives the same sign, a baptism of repentance. It's as if he is saying to those people that were being baptized with him.

And it was as if he was saying to us, I am with you. I am taking your place. I am entering into your plight.

[3 : 44] And I want you to think about what that means for you in times of your darkest struggles. When you wrestle with sins you hate.

Sins that would bring shame onto your life if they were exposed. Sins that sometimes feel like chains that you can't break. Jesus says to you, I have identified with you.

I have stepped into your place. I have taken those sins onto myself. Now, brothers and sisters, that's not just abstract theology.

That is a comfort to the soul. In those moments when God whispers that you are beyond hope, remember that Jesus was baptized with a blessing for sinners.

He took the sign of repentance not because he needed it, but because you did. And this is not just symbolic. John the Baptist points to Jesus and says, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

[4 : 53] And in another sense, the baptism of Jesus actually foreshadows his mission. To bear the sins of his people. To carry the shame of his people.

To provide cleansing for his people. Jesus does not just stand in solidarity. He actually takes on the burden. So when you fear that your sins are too ugly.

Or too humiliating. Or too extreme. Hear Jesus saying, I came for those sins. Trust me. I will take them on myself.

I will stand you before the Father clean and forgiven. I think Luke also wants us to see the connection here to Old Testament patterns.

In Numbers 8, Levitical priests had to be washed before beginning their ministry at age 30. Jesus, at about the age of 30 here, is baptized, not by a priest, but by his Father's divine appointment.

[6:01] So this could be seen as his anointing. His anointing in preparation for his priestly work. God the Holy Spirit descends.

God the Father speaks. And Jesus begins his public ministry as the Messiah. The sin bearer. The Savior. And he willingly accepts this role.

He doesn't shrink back. In fact, he embraces his mission with joy. Which means that the baptism of Jesus is about identification, anointing, and mission.

Which for us translates into assurance. When you wonder if God can forgive the things that you have done. When you feel trapped in a double life.

When the accuser, Satan, points at your failures. Remember the baptism of Jesus. He took the sinner's sign to show you that he takes the sinner's place.

[7:02] And that, brothers and sisters, is the gospel in action. Second theme I want to touch on is the communion that Jesus has with God the Father.

After mentioning the baptism, very briefly. Luke immediately adds, very briefly, that Jesus was praying. And this little phrase is unique to the gospel of Luke.

Matthew, Mark, and John do not highlight Jesus praying on this occasion. But Luke, in general, consistently draws attention to the prayer life of Jesus.

Over and over, Luke records how Jesus slips away from the disciples to pray. Wakes up early in the morning to pray. Goes up into the mountains and into the lonely places to pray.

Luke emphasizes that prayer is absolutely central to the ministry of Jesus. And why does he emphasize this? I think it's because Jesus' prayer life reveals his heart.

[8:09] I mean, he doesn't pray because he needs forgiveness. We've already covered that. He doesn't pray because someone else is forcing him to pray. He prays because he loves his heavenly Father.

And Jesus, delighted in the communion that he had with his heavenly Father, he longed for conversation. And so prayer was not a burden for him. It was a joy.

It was affection expressed with words. And that's why Jesus prays. And I think that Luke wants us to see this as an example.

That prayer is not meant to be a drudgery. That prayer is not just another box for a Christian believer to check. It is a conversation with the one that we love the most.

Yes, prayer is considered a spiritual discipline. And discipline matters. Even Jesus planned and practiced prayer, right? But discipline, I believe, flows out of desire.

[9:17] Jesus wanted to talk with his heavenly Father, and so he made time to do just that. And that's the model that Jesus gives us. That's his example.

John Piper puts it bluntly. Prayer is a duty the way breathing is a duty. It is necessary for life. Just as a scuba diver needs an air tank, just as a soldier needs a clean rifle, just as a diabetic needs insulin, Christians need prayer.

The devil deceives us by making prayer seem optional. But Jesus shows us that it is essential.

And he prayed because he loved his Father. And he prayed because he needed communion with the Lord to sustain him in his mission. And so ask yourself, do you want to pray?

Do you long to have conversations with your heavenly Father? Do you plan for it? Do you structure it? Do you discipline yourself for it?

[10:27] If not, take these verses from Luke as a reminder. Jesus prayed, and he invites you to follow his example. Prayer is not just an obligation, it's a delight.

It's affection expressed in conversation. It is the lifeline of the Christian experience. Which brings us to our final movement, the response of the Father.

As Jesus prays, Luke tells us, heaven opens, the spirit descends like a dove, and the Father speaks, you are my beloved son.

With you I am well pleased. This is the climax. The baptism of Jesus shows identification. The prayer of Jesus shows communion.

The voice from heaven shows affection. Notice the presence and beauty of the Trinity here. One God. Three persons in fellowship, communication, eternal relationship.

[11:36] Here we see the Trinity in action as well. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together in love and in mission. But the focus for Luke is on the words of God the Father.

He declares his love. He affirms his delight. He pours out his affection. You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. Imagine just for a second hearing those words from your dad. Imagine hearing those words from your dad.

Imagine knowing experientially that he delights in you. That's what Jesus receives here. And you know what?

This is the astonishing truth. Because Jesus identified with us. Because he took our sins. Because he shares his benefits with us.

[12:36] God the Father's love for Jesus Christ becomes God the Father's love for us. In John 17, Jesus asks the Father, May the love you have for me be also in them.

He prays that believers would experience the same love God the Father has for God the Son. And that means that if you are in Christ, the Father loves you just as much as he loves Jesus.

That is staggering. You are the recipient of that same eternal affection. His delight in the Son becomes his delight in you.

And I know many Christians struggle to believe this. I have struggled to believe this at times as well. They know it intellectually, but they don't feel it.

They doubt that God could love them that much. If you're in that camp, and like I said, I've been there, here's what I would say to you.

[13:46] See, the cross proves it. See, the cross is not only the means of redemption. It is the visible expression of that costly love.

The Father gave his Son. The Son gave himself so that you might experience this of divine affection. The baptism of Jesus anticipates this.

And the Father's words to the Son foreshadow his words to believers who would come after. One day he will say to you, Well done, faithful servant.

You are my beloved, and I delight in you. So think for a moment how that changes things. If you know the love of God the Father, if you taste his affection, then nothing else matters.

No loss that you could ever experience in this life can take away that best thing. No trial that you could experience in this life could take away that deepest joy.

[14:57] Because you have already tasted the greatest delight. And that means your Christian life does not have to be fueled by fear or guilt. It is fueled by love.

You don't obey to earn affection. You obey because you already have it. You don't pray to twist God's arm.

You pray because he delights in hearing from you. You don't fight sin to prove yourself. You fight sin because you know that you're already loved. Which makes the affection of God the foundation for our transformation.

And when you taste that love, everything else becomes a matter of life. Losses do not crush you because you have already received the greatest gift.

Trials do not overwhelm you because you've already experienced the deepest joy. Temptations lose their appeal because you've already tasted something better. So three massive truths from this passage.

[16:02] The baptism of Jesus shows his identification with sinners. He takes our place, bears our sins, and assures us of forgiveness. The prayer of Jesus shows his communion with God the Father.

He delights in heavenly fellowship, models discipline, and invites us into joyful prayer. The affection of God the Father shows his love for the Son and for us in him.

He declares delight. He pours out affection and grounds our Christian life in love. So then when you struggle with sin, when you struggle with feelings of despair, remember the baptism of Jesus and what it teaches us.

He took the sinner's sign to show he takes the sinner's place. He says, trust me. I will carry your shame. I will present you clean before God the Father.

And that, brothers and sisters, is cause for hope even in our darkest hours. When you struggle with prayer, remember the example of Jesus. He prayed simply because he loves his Father in heaven. [17:15] He delighted in communion. He planned and practiced it. And he invites you to do the same, not as drudgery or obligation, but as joy. And that is encouragement to you in your spiritual discipline.

When you struggle to believe that God truly loves you, remember the words of the Father. You are my beloved. In you I am well pleased. In Christ, these words are spoken over you. God delights in you as he delights in his own Son. That is assurance for your identity. And all of this flows from the willingness of Jesus to step into that water, to bow his head in prayer, and to receive the blessing of his Father's voice.

Baptism, prayer, affection. Three simple words. Three profound realities. Three pillars for the Christian life.

So what difference does this make? It means your Christian life is not about striving to earn God's favor, but about living out of the favor you already have.

[18:27] It means that your fight against sin is not in isolation, but shared with the Savior who has identified with you. It means your prayer life is not forced, but fueled by affection.

It means your identity is not shaky, but secure in God the Father's love. Brothers and sisters, imagine living every day with those truths in the front of our minds.

Imagine facing temptation, knowing that Jesus has already borne your guilts. Imagine praying with joy because you love your Father in heaven. Imagine walking through trials, knowing that God the Father delights in you.

This is the life that Luke points us toward. This is the life that Jesus makes possible. This is the life that the Holy Spirit empowers, and this is the life that God the Father blesses.

So let me encourage you to take these two short verses seriously. View the baptism of Jesus as our assurance. View the prayer of Jesus as our example.

[19:33] View the affection of God the Father as the very core of our identity. Live out the Christian life with confidence, joy, and love, because in Christ, we are forgiven sinners and beloved sons and daughters.

Amen. Would you pray with me? Heavenly Father, I thank you for so many gifts. I thank you for the gift of your word, revealing us everything that we need to know about salvation, everything that we need to know about living lives of gratitude in response to that great gift of salvation.

I thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, who illuminates the word for us, among other things. The Holy Spirit, that corresponding pledge, as our flesh is in heaven with Jesus Christ, and your spirit is here with us, assuring us of the great gifts that your son Jesus Christ secured for us on the cross.

Lord, I thank you most of all for the gift of your son Jesus. I thank you that not only do we see him as an example, and not only do we see him as a savior, but as we sang earlier in the service, we see him as a brother, because you have accepted us, adopted us into your family.

And Lord, that is staggering to think about. Lord, I pray that by the power of your spirit, that you would enable us to live into that reality more and more each day.

[21:19] We pray this for our good and for your glory, and in Jesus' name, amen. Thank you.