

# God backs his Servant Son

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Date: 13 December 2020

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[ 0 : 00 ] The reading today is from Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 through 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. Will you pray as we come to God's Word?

Let's pray. Father, I ask that you would make much of Jesus through your Word to us today, that we would see him more clearly.

[ 1 : 18 ] Lord, help us to understand the character of your Son better. Help us to love his character more.

Help us to understand why he came more clearly. And Lord, press that into our lives so that we might believe it, and that we might represent him if we belong to him.

Please shape us to be like him more because of our time together this morning. So please speak to us. Lord, I know that my words can't change myself even, let alone anyone else.

We need your Word to change us. So please be with us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I don't want to go into politics, okay, at all.

But do you remember President Trump's first, or one of his first acts when he went into office? It was a bit of a, for some at least, it was a bit of a scary week, what's going to happen.

[ 2 : 19 ] Do you remember the presidential order he gave, like just blocking out heaps of nations from coming into the U.S.? Now, I don't want to go into politics at all, but...

You don't believe me, obviously. But it sent a message, didn't it? He sent a very strong message, what his rule is going to be about.

Like he didn't go through the normal channels of making decisions. He made the decision. It wasn't going to be stuffing around. His rule is going to be one of action.

It just sent a very strong message early on. What about God's king? What's his first act? What is his rule going to be about? What message does he send?

This is the king of the world. What message is he going to send with his first act? What will his rule be like? In Matthew 3 today, we see the simple act of Jesus being baptized.

[ 3 : 23 ] We might be tempted to skip over this. Maybe yawn and just keep on reading and get to the exciting stuff. But this act, if we focus on it for a moment, we see what Jesus' rule is going to be about.

We see the framework for who he is and what he's come to do. So let's take our time and soak it in this morning. Jesus' baptism is like a prime minister being sworn into office.

It's like a prophet of God being called to start speaking on God's behalf. This is Jesus' commissioning.

This is his mission being launched. The one to bring in the kingdom of God is being sworn into office. And there's two parts to this episode.

We've got verses 13 to 15 where John the Baptist tries to stop Jesus from humiliating himself. And then you've got verses 16 and 17 where God the Father gives his total support and power to Jesus to bring in his kingdom.

[ 4 : 34 ] So there's the two parts. Let's go through it and see what we find. Well, in Matthew's Gospel, the anticipation has been building.

Matthew has clearly demonstrated that this human being named Jesus from Nazareth, a pretty despised place, he is a descendant of King David.

He was born in Bethlehem, as God say you would be. He is God's Messiah, with King Herod raging and plotting in vain against the Lord's anointed one, like in Psalm 2.

Matthew has clearly shown us this is God's King. And then last week we saw that the final prophet, the second Elijah figure, the strange figure, has arrived.

And he's declaring God's kingdom of heaven has arrived. This is it. It's started. We need the Holy Spirit to give us that internal change, to start living in God's ways, in God's kingdom.

[ 5 : 37 ] This is it. It's arrived. And those who don't want God's kingdom will find that there's severe consequences to that. So what will the king's inaugural act be?

What is it shaped by? What does that represent? And we already know it's his baptism. That's strange. It's not what I expect.

I don't think it's what John expected. Like most kings, when they come into power, their first act is to kill other threats to their throne. They come in with a really strong show of power to solidify their rule.

And that's kind of the language of Psalm 2. We've got, in Psalm 2, God's anointed with an iron scepter, smashing the nations like pottery.

That's a scary image. That's what I'm expecting, isn't it? Isn't that what? Jesus is going to just solidify his rule.

[ 6 : 47 ] He's going to come out with an iron scepter. Or we've got John's message ringing in our ears. That the axe is ready at the base of the tree. He's got the winnowing fork in his hand.

Fire is coming. Is he going to call down fire from heaven like in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah? What's he going to do? What show of power is he going to give to bring in his rule?

But so different from the world's ways of exerting power and position, Jesus comes to John to be baptized. Like the crowds who confess their sins came to John submitting to his message, Jesus comes to John and says he needs to be baptized by him.

Now this is the mighty one who's going to come bringing the Holy Spirit to baptize and he's receiving John's water baptism, which is just, that's just preparing for the real thing.

What is going on here? I need to be baptized by you. And do you come to me? Says John. He's trying to stop him.

[ 8 : 08 ] You're the mighty one. Don't do this. This isn't what your rule's about. To come under John's baptism was for a person to admit that by virtue of their sin, they do not belong to God's people.

They need to be cleansed and to be brought into relationship with God. Why would the king step off his throne and get on bended knee, admitting that he's been disloyal to the king?

Why would the judge come off the bench and act like the criminal or like the guilty?

Why would the mighty one be so humiliated? Why would he choose to do that? Well, Jesus gives us the answer, gives John the answer in verse 15.

He says why. Why? Let it be so now. Notice he doesn't say, I too need to repent, John.

[ 9 : 16 ] No one's perfect. He doesn't say that. He doesn't say, you've got too high a view of me, John. I'm just another human being. There's no false humility here.

He's saying, let it be so now. He agrees with John's estimation of him. Yes, I am the mighty one. Yes, I don't need to repent. But let it be so for the time being. This is necessary.

It's right for me to take a lower place. To fulfill all righteousness. Now, that's a strange phrase, isn't it?

It's meant to make things clearer. To fulfill all righteousness. I think what's going on here in this phrase is the words fulfill and righteousness are really key themes in Matthew's gospel.

To remember fulfill, like we looked at in our very first week in Matthew, is not merely just answering those specific Old Testament predictions like the Messiah being born in Bethlehem.

[ 10 : 20 ] That's very specific. It's not just that. It's fulfilled as in the whole Old Testament being the answer to the whole message of God. And righteousness for Matthew is about being in close relationship with God, living in the ways God wants you to live.

So, John had the right picture of Jesus. The power and the authority of the Messiah.

That this is the Lord himself walking into the building. That this is the judge of all the earth. John understood who Jesus was in that sense.

But has he understood the full picture of Jesus and what he's come to do? Obviously not. Otherwise, he wouldn't be trying to prevent him. He doesn't quite understand yet. For now, let's put Jesus' answer like this. I think he's saying this. John, to lower myself and identify with sinners is what I choose to do to obey the mission God has given me to do.

[11:40] Yes, I am that mighty figure. But I'm going to fulfill God's promises by lowering myself, choosing to lower myself in obedience to God. Identifying with sinners.

So, picture Jesus. Picture him. Being lowered by John into the water.

That's the nature of Jesus' ministry. That's what he's come to do. Being lowered into the water. If someone was watching from a distance, they would just assume that's another man, a sinful man, repenting of his sin.

That's his rule. Not a show of power by signing a presidential order.

Not a warrior who kills anyone who threatens his throne. Not a king who remains above his people.

[12:51] But coming and fully identifying with his people. With his sinful people. God in the flesh. Humbling himself.

Identifying with sinners like me. What do you think of this? What do you think of this? What do you think of this picture? What do you think of his first act? If you think you're important enough for Jesus to associate with you, you need to remember who this is.

This is the man who would decide your eternal fate. An eternity with him in heaven. Or apart from him in hell.

If you think you deserve for him to identify with you, remember who this is. But if you think God can't ever forgive you.

He couldn't possibly love you. You're just too ashamed. Could Jesus have done anything more to show you that he is with you in your sin?

[14:07] I don't think there's a bigger picture that he could show you. That he is with you in your sin. The next scene shows us that God the Father fully backs Jesus' mission.

So in verses 16 and 17, it seems that only Jesus and John witness the divine endorsement. So the pronouns are singular. This is the same in the other gospels. This is an intimate scene between God the Father and God the Son.

And John is getting to see it and witness it so that we can hear about it as well. As Jesus came out of the water, immediately, having chosen to lower himself and to become like his sinful people, we're told to look.

Look. Pay attention. Listen up. And what we hear and see is God's total backing of his Son. The heavens were opened like a veil, like a curtain between what we see and what's going on.

The divine rule over the world. The curtain is torn open. God is here. I think it's a picture of God totally being here. He's here in this moment. It's a picture.

[15:30] It's actually a reminder of Ezekiel when he's called to be a prophet. It's the same phrase used. The heavens were opened. God himself is here. He didn't just send an angel.

He is here himself. He is calling Jesus to begin his mission. He is with him 100%. He's not going on his own authority.

He's not going on the authority of an angel. He's not going on the authority of a human institution.

He's going on the authority of God the Father. Jesus himself could be sure that no matter what opposition he faces, he's got God the Father behind him.

And you and I better listen up. God the Father says, this is it. This is him. I'm behind him. If we've got an issue and we want to speak to the manager, no one higher, sorry.

The Father is behind him. The heavens are opened. He's fully there. And the Spirit coming to rest on him like a dove, it's a bit of a strange picture.

[16:35] I'm not sure exactly what it means. The commentaries I read weren't sure. It's not that Jesus is taking on a new spiritual status.

So when he receives a spirit, it's not like us when we become Christians, that we become the spiritual children of God, that our status changes. That wasn't the case for Jesus. What it is is the Spirit empowering.

You see it at the creation of the world in Genesis 1, at the Spirit hovering over the waters. Maybe that's what the dove is about, the hovering factor of what it looked like. Maybe it's meant to remind us of Genesis, where God created the world by the power of his Spirit.

In other words, God is giving all the power to Jesus to fulfill his mission. He's got the authority of God behind him, and he's got the power of God with him. This picture loudly says to us, Jesus' mission has God behind it.

Remember, that mission is characterized by him lowering himself. God is behind it. And then comes the audio to explain the visual. The voice from heaven says, This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

[17:52] It's a combination of Psalm 2, verse 7, and Isaiah 42, verse 1. This is my beloved Son, my only Son, with whom I am well pleased.

So that first half, this is my beloved Son. So that comes from Psalm 2. We've already thought about Psalm 2 a bit. Psalm 2 is that exalted king figure with the iron scepter.

Let me read some of the psalm to you. This is God speaking to his king. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

You will break them with a rod of iron. You will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise. Be warned, you rulers of the earth.

Serve the Lord with fear. And celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son. Submit to him. Or he will be angry.

[18:56] And your way will lead to your destruction. For his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. It's a formidable picture.

This is him. This is the one we are to take refuge in. This is the one with the iron scepter. It's a serious matter to resist him.

This is the picture of God's mighty king that John has been preaching about. But to combine it with the picture of Isaiah 42 is not what John expected.

I don't think it's what we expect either. Here's Isaiah 42. Here is my servant.

He will put my spirit on him. He will put my spirit on him. And he will bring justice to the nations.

[20:04] He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break. Or a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. This is a gentle, humble figure.

He won't cry out in the streets. This isn't just him not being loud and obnoxious. This is a picture of him when he suffers in the streets. He won't cry out for God to bring justice now.

He will trust him and continue on in his mission. He's a strong figure. It's a quiet confidence in God. And he's able to help those who are suffering, this servant figure.

So picture a candle with a wick, you know, in the wind where it's just almost blown out. It's just about to be extinguished. That picture of a weak person who's in their faith, who's struggling to trust God.

This person won't snuff it out. Won't just go, oh, that's pathetic. Blow it out. A reed that's already been broken. He won't just go, oh, I'm going to snap it off then.

[21:16] He doesn't do that. He cares for the wick so that his light burns again. He strengthens the reed. This is a gentle servant figure who obeys the Father.

I think it's a picture of someone who struggles to fight off sin. Someone who doubts Jesus.

Someone who is tempted to giving in when the Christian life is just too hard.

This figure does not go, oh, stuff them. This figure serves them and cares for them. And there's more to this picture in Isaiah.

Here's what God says to his servant figure. This is how his mission will be accomplished. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the nations.

To open eyes that are blind. To free captives from prison. And to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. The servant himself will be a covenant for the people.

[22:27] That's a strange phrase. It's not that he will make a covenant or enter into a covenant. He himself will be the covenant. A covenant is two parties coming together.

He himself will be the covenant. He's going to be the one who brings God and people together. That's where you find that coming together. It's in him.

It's in the servant himself. And the way he does that is opening blind eyes. He sets free those who are in prison. Those sitting in darkness in a dungeon.

He sets them free. Now blindness, being in prison, darkness. They're all images in Isaiah of worshipping something other than God.

It's living for something other than God. So the classic ones today, I think, are living for money and material things as if that's where life can be found.

[ 23 : 29 ] We're blind if we think that. We're sitting in darkness if we're worshipping money. Or our status, our reputation and career and success.

Or if life is all about family and romance. Anything. We can give ourselves to anything other than God. God deserves all our love.

God deserves all our love. All our worship. And the servant's mission is to set us free from that empty life living for ourselves.

And come into a life where we know the Father's love for us. With that delight in the Son. This is my Son.

In whom I'm well pleased. We can feel that same delight. So Jesus is the exalted King and he is the humble servant.

[ 24 : 31 ] It's what his mission is about. And if God the Father has given his total backing to Jesus, he's got no reservations.

He's empowered him. This is the only one God can say without any clarification, any nuance.

This person I'm well pleased in. He has his total backing. Here's what I think it means for us today.

We can know for sure that Jesus, only Jesus, is God's way for us to be saved from our sin and live a meaningful life. It's only in him.

We can know for sure that the only way to escape God's punishment for our sin is because Jesus lowered himself. Identifying with us to represent us.

[ 25 : 35 ] He came into the dungeon. Taking it upon himself. In Mark's gospel, Jesus describes him going to the cross as a baptism.

Of going down in death in order to be raised up. The only way we are saved is because Jesus identifies with us and represents us.

I think 2 Corinthians 5.21 says it best. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. So if you're new to Christianity, or if you're a believer trapped in the prison of your own sinful patterns, if you're searching for a way to feel peace and that clear conscience, that changed life, knowing that you're loved by God himself, if you're searching for that, you need Jesus to represent you.

It's not what you can do to change. It's trusting what the king can do on your behalf. That's what his rule is about. That's what he's declared in his baptism.

[ 27 : 07 ] I'm going to lower myself and serve you. Identify with your sin fully. Taking it upon me. And when we're set free, when we are set free to live for God, we're called to share in this same mission.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, we're given a commission. We're sworn in. Not to have a separate mission, but to continue Jesus' mission.

To bring in all the nations. To love God through the Son. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations. We're called to share in Jesus' mission.

But how are we going to carry out that mission? What are we representing when we say we're a Christian in the workplace and what we say and how we share the gospel? What is the shape of our mission?

What do people see in us? Do they see Jesus' baptism in us? Someone lowering themselves to serve. Someone not protecting their position.

[ 28 : 21 ] Not threatening, but identifying with sin. So that they might come into the love of God. What do people see in us? I think we're meant to have the same attitude as, or we are meant to have the same attitude as Paul in 1 Corinthians 9.

Although I'm free from all, because I'm now in Jesus, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. That's a baptism-shaped idea of mission. It's not trying to defend yourself in an argument with family or at work, demanding justice.

It's not crying out when you're being wronged, but it's lowering yourself, wanting to serve those who's wronged you to bring them closer to God.

What about as a church? Will we be baptism-shaped as we represent Jesus? Now this is just a small way, but I think today we have an opportunity to do that.

[ 29 : 40 ] We're excited coming together again, and so we should be. But there's some people who have been in this church for ages. Their position in the church is established. They're not worried

about when this service ends, who they're going to talk to.

They're looking forward. I wonder if we're going to give up our position to welcome those who are new. Now that's a small thing we can do, but I think it's a gospel-shaped thing. Like are we going to give up our comfort as a church and actually try and reach our neighbours, those who are smelly, those who are different?

Are we going to protect our position, or are we going to be baptism-shaped in representing Jesus so that they might see Jesus serving them and come to God?

Well, that's the nature of our king's rule. Not overpowering, but serving. What a great God we've got. What a great king.

Will you pray with me as we finish? Lord Jesus, thank you for choosing to serve.

[ 31 : 03 ] Lord, with your position, with who you are, with the fact that the Father has made you king over all nations, Lord, everyone should be serving you.

And yet you came not to be served, but to serve. Lord, that is a character that is so different from the ways of this world.

Help us see it. Help us love it. Help us love you for who you are. And help us want to serve you gladly, to become like you.

Please change our hearts so that we would be baptism-shaped in the way that we live and represent you. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. Amen. Heavenly Lord. Thank you.

[ 32 : 01 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.