

Jesus in Training: *Baptizing Jesus*

Matthew 3:13-17

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 22, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ In the past couple of weeks we've been in a mini-series called "Jesus in Training" where we're covering some of the early episodes in Jesus' life between the familiar birth narrative and his public ministry. It's a period of his life that we tend to brush over too quickly to get to the good stuff. Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus healing the leper and the lame. Jesus feeding the five thousand or walking on water. **But in these early episodes we get a glimpse of Jesus in training.** God is preparing him for his earthly ministry, for the great work of redemption that he set out to accomplish. There's a lot to be gleaned from these early episodes.

- ❖ So far we've seen Jesus presented at the temple as a little child and Jesus back at the temple at the age of twelve, amazing the teachers of the law with his biblical knowledge. Today's passage fast forwards eighteen years, and now Jesus is a thirty-year-old Galilean whose life vocation (up to this point) has been carpentry.
 - ▶ **But now he's about to have a career change. He's going to take on a new vocation.** That's what his baptism is all about. It signals the start of his public ministry. His messiahship is going to take on a much more public, visible form.
 - But don't get confused here. It's not that he becomes the Messiah at his baptism. It's not as if his baptism is where he receives the Spirit of God for the first time or where he's conferred the title Son of God. No, Jesus has always been the Son of God, always been filled by the Spirit, always been the Messiah. But now he's going public with it.

- ❖ If you think about it, that's essentially the same thing that happens in our baptism. Jesus's baptism is not the same as the baptism that Christians receive. **But nonetheless we learn a lot about Christian baptism through the baptism of Christ our Lord.** That shouldn't be surprising. So we're going to study his baptism and its own significance, but I want to drive it home by connecting it with our own baptisms.

- ❖ I'm grateful for this text because I think we could use more direct teaching on baptism. It shouldn't have to wait until a baptism class. **And I feel this way because I still get the impression that many Christians see baptism as merely a ritual.** At worst, it's seen as a mere formality. At best, baptism is an important milestone in one's spiritual journey but its significance to your Christian life now is fuzzy or simply unconnected.
 - ▶ **It could be why some of you are very comfortable publicly identifying yourself as a Christian but you've never been baptized.** It's not that you're against the idea. You just never felt the need. No one ever explained the importance or significance. Well that's what I hope, by the grace of God, to accomplish this morning.

- ❖ And for those of you here who are not Christians or don't really know what you believe, I hope you come away with a better sense of why Christians feel the need to dunk each other under water. Next week we actually have the honor of baptizing five of our brothers and sisters, so I hope you come back to witness Christian baptism up close and personal.

- ❖ So let's cover this passage by asking three questions. I've divided this message up by these three questions, which you'll find in your bulletin outline. 1) Why is John reluctant to baptize Jesus? 2) Why does Jesus want to get baptized? 3) Why does Jesus's baptism matter to us?

Why is John reluctant to baptize Jesus?

- ❖ Let's tackle the first question: *Why is John so reluctant to baptize Jesus?* We see that right off the bat. Read again with me starting in v13, "¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"
 - ▶ Now before go into answering our question, let's lay out some context. Let's first figure out what John the Baptist was doing in the first place. ***What kind of baptism was he offering?***
- ❖ **At the beginning of chapter 3, we're introduced to John as a man entering the public scene and taking on the form and role of an OT prophet.** He's dressed in camel hair with a leather belt around his waist, and he's living out in the wilderness eating locusts and wild honey. That's like a mirror image description of the OT prophet Elijah (cf. 2 Kg. 1:8). And his prophetic message is the same: Repent, O Israel; turn from your sins and turn back to God. **And so his baptism is described as a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins** (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:4).
- ❖ **It's important to note that baptism was a recognized practice in ancient Judaism, but it was reserved for God-fearing Gentiles who sought to convert to Judaism.** You wouldn't baptize a Jew. That was unheard of because it was unnecessary. Baptism was viewed as a ritual cleansing ceremony. Anyone outside the camp, outside the covenant community, was ritualistically unclean, but that could be washed away by the waters of baptism.
 - ▶ But here in the ministry of John the Baptist, something unheard of and unprecedented was happening. **Jews – members of the covenant community – were coming to be baptized for repentance!** They were convicted and brought to the conclusion that their Jewishness – their blood lineage and family heritage – was no guarantee of a right standing before the Holy God (cf. 3:9).
 - These Jews were realizing that they needed to confess their sins and repent of them. To turn their back on a life of sin and turn their face back to God. **This transformed the significance of baptism.** If a heart of repentance was the true focus of baptism, then it was no longer viewed as a ritual cleansing of the body – but an outward sign of an inner transformation of the heart.
- ❖ **Friends, let's be careful not to fall into the same mentality of treating baptism as a ritualistic cleansing.** There's nothing magical about the water. Baptism doesn't work automatically, independent of the faith of the one receiving it. A heart of repentance is fundamental. There are plenty of people who were baptized as young teens, but as adults they're no longer walking with Jesus. They're not walking in repentance, or as John puts it in v8, they're not bearing fruit in keeping with repentance.

- ❖ Teenagers, kids, listen up. **Getting baptized is not going to save you.** Don't get pressured into baptism. Don't just do it because everyone in your class seems to be getting baptized. **Don't let anyone pressure you into it, including your parents.** I've served in youth ministry, so I've had to deal with my share of well-intentioned but theologically-misinformed parents who couldn't bear the thought of their precious child living another day on this earth without being baptized. God forbid we lose them in a freak accident before they're baptized.
 - ▶ Let's be real. That could totally happen. **But it's not dying without baptism that should concern you.** It's dying without having repented in your heart for your sins, without having turned to Jesus for your salvation. That's what should concern you.

- ❖ Young people, don't be like the Pharisees and Sadducees who relied on their family heritage, on being children of Abraham. **If you're growing up in a Christian family, it's tempting to rely on that.** You think you're a Christian because you were raised that way. That might work for other religions but not for Christianity.
 - ▶ **No one is born Christian. To be Christian, you have to be born again.** You have to be changed from the inside out by the power and grace of God. ***So how do know if you're born again?*** You know if you can repent of your sins from the heart. And if you can (if you have), then let's talk about getting baptized.

- ❖ **As a church, the thing we want to avoid is baptizing any of you when you're not ready.** That's why John the Baptist was right to not baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7). They weren't ready because they weren't repentant. If they would only repent of their sins, then they'd be ready. But as it stands, John's reluctant.

- ❖ Now when Jesus shows up to the River Jordan, we see that John is equally reluctant but for a completely different reason. **He's reluctant to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because of their unworthiness, but now in v14, John's reluctant to baptize Jesus because of his own unworthiness.** There are three ways to answer our question. John's reluctant because a) Jesus is greater than him, b) Jesus's baptism is greater than his, and c) Jesus has no need to repent.

- ❖ **First, John's reluctance stems from the fact that Jesus is greater than him.** John knew his role. At the time, Jews were flocking to him thinking he might be the Messiah (Lk. 3:15). But he refuted those claims. He's not the Messiah. He's the messenger preparing the way for the Messiah. He says in v11, *"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry."* So from John's perspective, how can he baptize Jesus? How can the lesser baptize the greater?
 - ▶ **Second, John's reluctance stems from the fact that Jesus's baptism is greater than his.** He goes on to say in v11 that while he baptizes with water, *"[the Messiah] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* John's baptism of water was only a sign of a repentant heart and a changed life. But Jesus's baptism of the Spirit and fire actually produces the changed life and repentant heart.

- ❖ John realizes he's offering only a shadow and sign of what Jesus offers. And he wants what Jesus has to offer. He wants to be baptized by the Spirit. Is that what you want? Is that what you've received? ***Have you been Spirit baptized? Then you should be water baptized.***
 - ▶ And again, how do you know if you've received the baptism of the Spirit? Don't look to outward signs of spiritual gifts or abilities. Look to an inward contrition of heart. Do you hate your sin? Do you turn to Jesus in faith seeking forgiveness? Those are sure signs of Spirit baptism and good reasons for you to receive water baptism.
- ❖ **Third, John's reluctance stems from the fact that Jesus has no need to receive a baptism for repentance since he has no sins of which to repent.** The consistent witness of Scripture portrays Jesus as sinless. He was tempted in every way as we are. In the next chapter (which we'll cover next week) Jesus is led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil himself. But he never gives in. He never sins. He perfectly obeys his Father's will. So if he has no sin then he has no need for a baptism of repentance. He doesn't need John's baptism.

Why does Jesus want to get baptized?

- ❖ So why does Jesus even want to get baptized? That's our next question. The answer is pretty amazing. He explains it in v15, "*But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.*"
 - ▶ So he says it's fitting for John to baptize him because then they can "*fulfill all righteousness*". Now what does that mean? Well in Matthew's Gospel he uses the word *righteousness* to refer to a conformity to God's will. So Jesus is telling John that it's fitting for them to do this in order to fulfill God's will. In other words, Jesus knows it's his Father's will for him to be baptized.
- ❖ Why so? That answer is not satisfying. It just pushes our question higher up. **Jesus wants to get baptized to fulfill God's will, but why does God want his Son to be baptized?** We still haven't provided a reason beyond because God said so.
 - ▶ Getting baptized out of obedience to God's will is commendable, but I fear for many of you that's the only reason (motivation) you've got. But you shouldn't be satisfied with that alone. In the same way, we shouldn't be satisfied without knowing why God said so. Thankfully there are two reasons we can give from our text.
- ❖ **First, because in baptism Jesus is able to identify with sinners like us.** We often speak of baptism as a way to identify with Christ in his death and resurrection. **But in his baptism, Christ is also identifying with us.** He's identifying with sinners – being numbered with transgressors (Isa. 53:12) – even though he himself is without sin.
 - ▶ That's his mission. That's what he came to do. John is wondering why are you the one getting baptized? **It should be me getting baptized by you. What are you doing in my place?** And Jesus's answer is because I'm fulfilling all righteousness.

- ❖ This is what I've come to do. I've come to be baptized in your place (even though I don't need it myself). I've come to repent in your place (even though I have nothing to repent of). I've come to live a life of righteousness (of perfect obedience to the Father's will) in your place. And I've come to die a sin-atonement death in your place. That's what Jesus came to do.
- ❖ **That's what makes Christianity different from all other religions.** There are obviously significant differences between the various world religions and cults out there, but there is one thread of commonality between them all. **In one way, shape, or form you're essentially saved by your life.** Your salvation (however that's defined) depends on your life – the devoutness of your life, the purity and holiness of your life, the faithfulness of your life to whatever divine standard you're following.
 - ▶ But Christianity is different. **Christianity says you're saved not by your life but someone else's.** Christianity is a rescue religion. And it's a representative religion. Someone else represents you. And this Someone rescues you from condemnation by fulfilling the life of righteousness you're supposed to live.
 - That's Jesus' mission. **He came to identify with sinful humanity, to live the life we should've lived and to die the death our sins deserve.** And the good news of the Gospel is that his life and his death can be counted as yours by faith alone. Not by earning it but by receiving it as a free gift of grace.
- ❖ So that's the first reason why God wants his Son to be baptized – so he can identify with sinners like us. Now here's the second: **In baptism Jesus is able to identify with God's Suffering Servant.**
 - ▶ The passage goes on to describe in v16 how the moment Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove and came to rest on him. It's not clear if Matthew just meant the Spirit descended like a dove or if he actually appeared in the form of a dove.
- ❖ But regardless, the main significance jumps out when you connect it with the voice that comes from heaven in v17 to say, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" That's the voice of God. And if you're thinking how crazy it would be if that were to happen today – if a voice were to come out of heaven as you're walking to your car later – you have to understand that John and others in attendance that day would've felt the same.
 - ▶ **Voices out of heaven were not a common occurrence.** Remember, it had been over four hundred years of silence from heaven. Four hundred years since the last prophets, since the last messengers, since the last time the people heard from. So imagine everyone's surprise as God breaks his silence.
- ❖ He says, "This is my Son" instead of "You are my Son", so I take that to mean that Jesus was not the only one to hear this voice. An audience heard it. And what did they hear? They heard the voice of God citing two OT verses, Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.

- ❖ **Psalm 2 was well recognized by Jews in Jesus's day as a messianic psalm. It predicted and pointed to the coming Messiah and describes him as a conquering king.** The nations will rage and plot in vain to conspire against this king, but he will break them with a rod of iron. And in Psalm 2:7 the LORD God says to the Messiah, "You are my Son". This mighty, kingly Messiah will be a Son to God.
- ❖ But then the phrase "*with whom I am well pleased*" is a reference to Isaiah 42. Listen to 42:1, "*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nation.*"
 - ▶ **This is where we're introduced to this messianic figure, the LORD's chosen Servant, upon whom God has put his Spirit.** It's through this Servant that God will rescue and redeem his people, but it'll be – not through conquering and defeating – but through suffering and being defeated. The Suffering Servant shows up again in Isaiah 53, and there we're told that he'll be pierced for our transgressions; crushed for our iniquities; by his wounds we will be healed (Isa. 53:5).
- ❖ The Jews in Jesus's day didn't know what to do with these two seemingly contradictory depictions of the Messiah. **They thought there's no way the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42 could be the Mighty King of Psalm 2.** It's not possible.
 - ▶ But now a voice breaks out of heaven and says, "Yes it is. Here he is. This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." **This is God's stamp of approval. He's commissioning his Son to take on a new job.** This is a career change for Jesus. He's going to take on the role of the Suffering Servant. And in this baptism, God is testifying to how pleased he is with his Son and with his new vocation.
- ❖ It'll be a vocation of pain, of tears, of suffering, of a cross. But in fulfilling all righteousness, in doing the Father's will, his task will end with victory, with resurrection, with a crown and a throne, with a Bride and a people redeemed from every nation, tribe, and tongue.
 - ▶ This is why the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work in concert to get the Son baptized by John the Baptist. This is why Jesus sought a baptism of repentance even though he had no sin of his own to repent of.

Why does Jesus's baptism matter to us?

- ❖ Now having asked and answered two important questions of the text, I think we should conclude by asking and answering a very important question for each of us. Namely, why does Jesus's baptism matter? What does it have to teach us about our own baptism?
- ❖ There's no doubt that Jesus took baptism seriously and didn't treat it as some ritual. If you're a professing Christian but have yet to be baptized, I wonder what's preventing you. **If Jesus – the one you're claiming to follow – went through the waters of baptism, then why won't you?** How can you call him Master and Lord if you won't follow him at the start? Remember, Jesus, in his public ministry, started off with baptism. Baptism is no mere ritual. If anything, it's three things: It's obedience. It's identification. And it's commissioning.

- ❖ **First, baptism is obedience.** We said earlier that obedience shouldn't be the only motivation to get baptized but it should be foundational. Jesus commanded his us to make disciples of all nations – baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19).
 - ▶ So at a foundational level, you should get baptized because your Lord asked you to. That's his expectation. That should be enough, but Jesus gives us reasons.

- ❖ **Second, baptism is identification.** I mentioned this earlier as well. Beyond “because Jesus said so”, we should get baptized because it's how we identify with him in his death and resurrection. He first identified with sinners like us and took on baptism and took on the role of the Suffering Servant, and now we can identify with him as our Savior.
 - ▶ Our immersion under the water symbolizes our unity with Christ in death, and our subsequent elevation out of the water represents our unity with Christ in resurrected life. I think a baptism is a visually beautiful portrayal of the gospel.
 - **But a baptism is not just identification with Christ but also with his Church.** By getting baptized you're publicly identifying with the people of God. If you let a church baptize you, you're saying you're with them. You're identifying yourself with them. That's why we don't want to simply baptize you. We want to join you to the church and connect you to fellow members.

- ❖ **Third, baptism is commissioning.** Jesus's baptism was a commissioning service where God spoke and testified that he's ready to serve and suffer for the lost. Something similar takes place in your baptism. We usually understand baptism as an opportunity for you to testify to God. But here we see it's also a chance for God to testify to you. To say something about you.

- ❖ When we baptize those five brothers and sisters next week, they're going to testify to being sons and daughters of God. **But at the same time, God will be testifying to them and about them.** I doubt it's going to be an audible voice from heaven. But nonetheless, in every baptism, God is saying something important about the one being baptized.
 - ▶ **Through the affirmation and action of one of his churches baptizing you, God is testifying that you are his beloved – because you're in a saving relationship with the Beloved.** In your baptism, God testifies that he's well pleased with you because you're united by faith to his Good and Faithful Servant with whom he is well pleased.

- ❖ **And now you're commissioned to follow in the footsteps of Christ, to serve and suffer for the lost in this world.** If you're going to get baptized but then do nothing to make disciples of all nations, to pursue the Great Commission you were baptized into – then it's like going through a graduation ceremony, receiving your diploma, but then out of your own choice you're just sitting at home doing nothing.
 - ▶ Some of us are like that. **We're Christians, but we're unemployed in a Great Commission-sense.** We need to get off our couches and get employed for the cause of Christ. February is Missions Month. We'll try to equip for gospel work on both a global and local scale. You should start praying and preparing your heart. If you've been baptized, you're been commissioned and now you're ready to be deployed.