

The Baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:15-17, 21-22)

On December 15, 2024, my sermon was titled “The Message of John.” During that sermon I talked about Jesus being more “worthy” and “more powerful” than John the Baptist. I also talked about the Messiah’s judgment and made note of four points: the winnowing fork, the threshing floor, and the wheat, and chaff (also covered here in verse 17).

In **Luke 3:4**, Luke recalls the words of Isaiah, speaking of John the Baptist as “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord.’” Indeed, John is getting Israel ready to meet her Messiah.

Yet, John’s preaching has led the people to conclude wrongly that he must be the Messiah as we heard in **verse 15**. John corrects them and identifies **two** important things about the One who is coming. **First**, he is immeasurably greater than John. In fact, John says he is not worthy to untie the straps of Jesus’ sandals (verse 16). In Judea, teachers were held in the highest regard by their followers. As the saying went, a student must do whatever his teacher commands, except untie his

sandals. This task was reserved for slaves. However, says John, even the most demeaning of jobs would be too exalted for him.

The **second** important thing identified by John was that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit and fire, or, in other words, with the purifying, refining Spirit (verse 16). But how do you do that? What makes the selfish become selfless? An inner renewal and cleansing is required. John's baptism cleansed the outside, but only Jesus' fiery baptism will clean the heart.

Luke now records Jesus' baptism, which really is the formal beginning of his ministry (vv. 21-22). Some of you might wonder why would Jesus need to be baptized; he was sinless? The answer lies in the fact that baptism is *both* obeying God and securing God's approval. This is why Jesus was baptized, and it is why we are baptized.

So, Jesus obeyed God by being baptized with the people. Note the words in **verse 21**, "When all the people were being baptized." Some scholars say Jesus was baptized *after* all the people were baptized; others *while* they were being baptized. It does not matter which is factual.

The point is this: Jesus was right in the midst of the people obeying God with them. Whatever is the fact, Jesus was doing at least **two** things. **1st**, he was demonstrating that He, the Son of God, was fulfilling all righteousness. He, too, was being obedient to God, fulfilling every law of God for man. And **2nd**, he was demonstrating his humiliation, that he was Man, fully Man. As Man, he was required to live obediently to God just as other men were. There was one difference, however; Jesus lived a sinless life, and by such He became the Perfect and Ideal Man, the Pattern for all men.

Every man should respond to the gospel of God; that is, he should seek God to forgive his sins, repent, and be baptized. This is God's will for every man. Every man should obey God and fulfill all righteousness. Baptism is an act of obedience; it is obeying God right along with other believers. We can find this in **Matthew 3:13-15**, "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"

Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fill all righteousness.' The John consented."

So, no man is above any other man, not in the eyes of God. God's own son had to obey him; he had to be baptized as a sign of obedience to God. We, too, have to be baptized if we are truly repenting and seeking God to forgive our sins. We are not above God's will and his instructions to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38).

In addition to obeying God by being baptized, Jesus obeyed God in prayer. While Jesus was being baptized, he was praying. His mind and thoughts were upon God. He was in fellowship and communion with God. This is as it should be. Why would a person's mind be elsewhere while he is being baptized if he is sincere? Baptism is an outward sign of God's working within the heart of a person. The inward working and inward grace of God is sought by prayer. Thus, true baptism is the first act whereby a man shows that he is in communion with God.

When a person is baptized, it secures God's approval. Why? God is very pleased for the person obeying and following in the steps of Jesus. Jesus' baptism pleased

God. And God showed his approval in **three** ways. **1st**, the heavens were opened (v. 21). This was probably for **two** purposes. The **first purpose** was to give a very special sight and sense of God's glory and presence. The Lord's baptism was the launch of his ministry to men. Jesus needed a very special glimpse of God's glory and presence. He needed the stamp of God's approval and power. The **second purpose** was to reveal to John and perhaps to the others standing there (if the opening of heaven was visible to all) that Jesus was truly the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

The **second** way God showed his approval Jesus' baptism was that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus "in a bodily form like a dove." The dove was a sacred bird to the Jews. It was a symbol of peace and gentleness, or purity and innocence, but even more significant, it was often identified with the Spirit of God. When the dove descended upon Jesus, it symbolized the Spirit of God Himself descending upon Jesus. He was descending upon Jesus to identify Jesus as the Messiah and to provide

Jesus with the power of God. John went out of his way to stress that the Spirit's descent upon Jesus was unique: he waited and he remained upon Jesus. The Holy Spirit entered the life of Jesus once for all, permanently and powerfully, in his full manifestation and unlimited power.

The **third** way that God showed his approval of Jesus' baptism was that the voice of God was heard. When we genuinely obey God and are baptized, God is pleased. We also secure his approval in the same three ways. **1st**, God opens heaven up to us and gives us a very special sense of his presence, a sense of his approval, a sense that we are pleasing him immensely. Which is what we can find in **Ephesians 1:3**, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." The **2nd** way we secure God's approval is that God manifests and reveals His Spirit to us in a very special sense. We are obeying him, and significant moments of obedience bring special manifestations of the Spirit. Which is what we can read in **John 14:21**, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves

me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

The **third** way we secure God's approval is that God's Word is heard. The fact that we are baptized is a sign that we have heard his command to be baptized, and because we are obeying him, he continues to speak to us day-by-day, as we see his will in the Bible and prayer.

Another remarkable thing happened when Jesus was baptized. As heaven was torn open and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, the Father's voice declared to Jesus, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” In Matthew's gospel God speaks only twice; here and at the transfiguration, and both times he preaches the same message, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (**Matthew 3:17**).

God is a one-sermon preacher, with one supreme message to the world: “Look, listen, and love Jesus, my Son.” Jesus is the Son and Servant of God. This baptism is a prototype for all Christian baptisms, for our baptism reminds us of our identity in Christ. We are God's

children and servants, initiated into God's family and commissioned into his service.

Note how the three persons in the Trinity were united at the Jordan River (Mark 1:10-11). Salvation is the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who united perfectly to save us from sin and death. What a wonderful, comforting, and reassuring truth!

What are the **lessons** we can learn from this Scripture reading?

This Scripture reading teaches us that Jesus is God's beloved Son, fully approved by the Father, and that through his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him, signifying his special mission, and empowering him for ministry. This passage also reinforces the idea that we too are beloved by God and experience his approval when we fully commit to following him and living a righteous life.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing Jesus as your beloved Son at his baptism, and for the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove. Fill us with your Spirit. Grant us the assurance that we are also your cherished children, empowered to live a life pleasing to you. Guide us to always follow in Jesus' footsteps, and to reflect your love in our actions. We ask for this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**