

The Messiah Has Come
(A Study in Matthew - Week 6)
Matthew 3:13-17
“The Baptism”

Introduction

So Jesus said to them, “When you lift up The Son of Man, then you will know that I AM He, and that I do nothing on My own. But just as The Father taught Me, I say these things. The One Who sent Me is with Me. He has not left Me alone, because I always do what pleases Him.”
John 8:28-29

Jesus and John the Baptist were from completely different worlds. Christ was born in the line of King David from the tribe of Judah, and as such, a descendant of a king. John was born in the tribe of Levi, the child of Zechariah a practicing priest at the Temple in Jerusalem. Christ spent His earliest years living in Egypt, before His parents took Him to live in Nazareth, a small town in the province of Galilee, while John was from the province of Judah. Therefore, it is more than a little plausible that the two of them never spent any time together whatsoever as they grew into adulthood.

Many assume that simply because the two men were cousins, that they would have known each other well, but living approximately one hundred miles apart would actually suggest otherwise. The two had an encounter while they were both still in the womb (**Luke 1:41**), but it is quite possible that they had never laid eyes on each other until Jesus’ journey from Galilee to the Jordan river to be baptized by John.

This would explain why John the Baptist is quoted in John’s Gospel as having said, “**I didn’t know Him, but I came baptizing with water so that He might be revealed to Israel.**” (**John 1:31**). I personally believe that John had been given a vision by God revealing to Him who Jesus was, and when He saw Him, he immediately recognized Him. And it was confirmed after he had baptized Jesus in the Jordan, when God both audibly and visually confirmed Jesus as The Son. If that is the case, then when Jesus made His way to The Jordan River in obedience to His Father, it may very well have been the first time these two had met face to face. I’m not stating this as a matter of fact, but simply my own opinion.

John was taken aback when The Messiah, The Son of God came to him and requested to be baptized. And understandably so, for being Who He was, Christ had no need of repentance. He was the sinless one, and John’s baptism signified the repentance and renouncement of sin. Jesus had no sins to renounce, and this is why John was so shocked upon hearing His request. But God had a purpose in mind for these things, and The Son always lived to please The Father.

As we study this famous passage today, there are a few things that I would like for us to see. There is much about the workings of God and His redemptive plan that is revealed to us through Christ’s baptism. Matthew wanted his readers to fully comprehend that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah, King of the Jews. The word Messiah actually means “The Anointed one of God”, and in Christ’s baptism, we see God’s endorsement of His Anointing. This is why it was so important for Matthew to add this particular event into his narrative to persuade the Jewish people.

The word for baptism in the Greek means “immersion”, and it represents a death, burial, and a resurrection. This is why we baptize only by immersion in our church. We want to accurately portray not only Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, but our own as well. For when we believe in Him, the self-centered, sinful person we once were is put to death, and buried, and we are raised again to walk in newness of life, baptized in The Holy Spirit and forever changed from the inside out!

So, let us look together at this beautiful passage of Scripture and “*taste it again for the first time*”, as it were. In the baptism of our LORD we see, *The Debate and Defense*, *The Dove*, and *The Declaration*. Please allow me to explain.

The Debate and Defense (vs.13-15)

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. But John tried to stop Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and yet You come to me?" Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then John allowed Him to be baptized. Matthew 3:13-15

When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching he exclaimed, "**Look, The Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29). He instantly recognized Jesus just by sight, which leads me to believe that God had revealed His Son to him in a prior vision. Jesus stepped into the river with John and commanded the prophet to baptize Him. And that is where a most interesting discourse began. For how could he, John, a sinner presume to baptize The Anointed of God? Christ was not in need of repentance, for He Himself had never once committed a single sin! This is what qualifies Him to be our substitutional sacrifice. So John tried to debate with Christ and talk Him out of being baptized. The pertinent question that arises from this exchange is simple: Why would The Son of God even *need* to be baptized?

Now there are a ton of theologians out there who are far more intelligent and qualified than I will ever be. And they have offered a plethora of reasons as to why God wanted His Son to be baptized. And mind you, all of them are good arguments. But since *The Bible* doesn't tell us the reason, all we can really do is speculate as to the "why" of it.

Many have said that it is because the Christ, Who came to save sinners, was baptized, so that He could personally identify with those whom He came to save. Possibly. Another line of reasoning suggests that He did it to symbolize His own death, burial, and resurrection which would serve as a means of saving the lost and dying among us. I actually like that one better. But again, I'm not certain which of these or possibly even both are the actual reasons.

Others have said it is because Christ was "setting an example" for us to follow. I find that this really doesn't fully satisfy my inquiring mind any more than the other two. So I would like to offer a reason that seems to work for me (doesn't mean its the right one, but if I may be allowed to speculate). For me, it comes down to the answer that Christ Himself offered to John in defense of His own argument to be baptized:

"Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness."

Matthew 3:15

Now remember, this gospel was being written to Jews. And I am quite certain that when they heard the phrase "*to fulfill all righteousness*" their minds went straight to The Law of Moses. To fulfill all righteousness, to them, would most certainly have meant, "*to fulfill the requirements of The Law*". And what were those requirements exactly? Well according to the Law of Moses, it was the priests who examined and approved a sacrifice, before it could be offered. And when it was slaughtered, it was the priests who washed it and cleansed it before it could be placed upon the altar.

Now, follow my logic here. John had just declared that Jesus was The Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice in other words, Who would wash away the sin of the world. John was a Levite, descended from the line of priests. And for a sacrifice to be offered, it had to be confirmed by a priest, and then, washed by a priest. So, I believe when Jesus said, "**this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.**", he was referring to John's position of authority as a priest to confirm Christ as the ultimate sacrifice as required by law. Now, this is not a hill I am willing to die upon, but I do believe that it is worth considering. John both endorsed Christ as the sacrificial lamb and proceeded to wash Him in water before He would be placed upon the altar of God, namely the cross. Then this act would seem to be just another part of John's responsibility as the "forerunner" of the Messiah! And *that* makes perfect sense to me!

The Dove (vs. 16)

When Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. Matthew 3:16

Immediately after John obeyed The LORD'S command, a confirmation was given from above. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (**Hebrews 11:6**), and it is often *after* we are obedient to The Word of God, by faith, that we see the conformation of our faith. The heavens opened up for Jesus, and The Spirit of God descended upon Him. It was the beginning of a new work that God was doing. Jesus' ministry was commissioned by the Holy Spirit, giving Him everything that He needed to fulfill His work here on earth. The Messiah (Anointed One) was publicly anointed in the presence of John and many witnesses.

The first mention of a "dove" in Scripture comes in the **eighth chapter of Genesis**, when Noah released a dove out into the world after the flooding had stopped. The dove, finding no place to rest, returned and landed upon the Ark. Here we see The Spirit descending like a dove to rest upon the true Ark of our salvation, namely Christ Jesus Himself. He was worthy of The Spirit's anointing presence, for He was holy and acceptable to God. The Spirit could have "landed" as it were upon no one else in this wicked world!

Jesus' was about to be led into the wilderness to be tested, and He would sorely need the power of The Spirit to resist temptation. So God publicly endorsed Him and empowered Him at the same time. What an incredible sight it must have been for John and his followers to see heaven itself open up in such a visual display. But God was not through with His endorsement, He would also speak in an audible voice so those witnesses would hear for themselves that this was indeed The Son of The Most High God!

We have this exact same Spirit, when we are baptized into Christ by faith. He comes and indwells every Believer permanently and seals us to be secure in Christ:

In Him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

And just as Christ was empowered to face temptation by The Spirit, we too are empowered by this same Spirit who enables us to have victory over every obstacle, even that of death and hell, for as He empowered Christ to overcome, He will also empower us. As Paul would remind the Believers in Ephesus:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what is the wealth of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of His strength. He exercised this power in Christ by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavens — Ephesians 1:18-20

In other words, the very same Spirit that descended upon Christ at His baptism, the same Spirit that enabled Him to face every temptation the devil threw at Him, and the same Spirit that ultimately rose Him from the grave, now lives within *EVERY* Believer! So, what is out there that you cannot overcome? What remains of this world that can cause us to fear? Is it any wonder *The Bible* tells us:

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

The Declaration (vs. 17)

And a voice for heaven said, "This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." **Matthew 3:17**

Not only did The Spirit descend upon The Son for all to see, but the Father in heaven also spoke in an audible voice so that all who are there may hear the endorsement of The Son as well. The Father and The Spirit were always at one with Christ, but God provided this display so that the people would believe. God affirmed to all that were present that Christ is indeed The Son, and that He is well pleased with Him. This is The LORD'S declaration that Jesus is in fact the promised Messiah sent from heaven to be king over God's chosen people. I can only imagine what a powerful voice it was that spoke as Christ came up from the waters of the Jordan!

Three times in *The New Testament* God speaks in an audible voice. Once at Jesus' baptism, once upon the mount of transfiguration (**Matthew 17:5**), and a final time just prior to Jesus' death upon the cross (**John 12:28**). Each were affirmations of The Son as He obeyed His Father's commands. Jesus ever lived to please His Father (**John 8:29**).

Many so-called theologians today argue against the existence of a Triune God. And many others have falsely claimed that God only "manifests" Himself in three persons, that He, in essence, can only reveal Himself as one of the three at any given time. And while it is true that the word "trinity" is not by itself ever written in the Scriptures, here we can clearly see the separate, and yet equal, members of the Godhead in undeniable display. We see The Son and The Spirit, while hearing the voice of The Father. So there can be little rational argument as to their separate, and yet equal, personages.

And also to those who would deny the Holy Trinity, hear the words of Christ as He gives the great commission:

"All authority has been given Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of The Father and of The Son, and of The Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18b-20

So you see, Christ Jesus is The Messiah, The King, and LORD over all creation. He is equal to The Father in every way, because all authority has been given to Him. And when you place your faith in Him, repenting of your sins, and committing yourself to follow after Him, you are baptized in Him and sealed within Him by The Spirit, inseparably bound in Him for all eternity. His death, burial, and resurrection has insured us that we will conquer death and shall rise to be with Him for ever. He is the Beloved Son in whom The Father is well pleased. Believe in Him, and The Father shall also be well pleased... with you! For no one comes to The Father, except through The Son. And The Spirit will guide you into this truth, if you have ears to hear it!

And let the Believers all say...**TRUTH!!!**