

Matthew 3:1-17

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[0 : 00] Please have a seat and turn back to Matthew chapter 3, that's on page 808. If you're needing a Bible, they're just out the door as you came in. We're beginning a short two-part series in Matthew over this week and next week, so we're in Matthew 3 today and we'll be in Matthew 4 next week.

If you're anything like me or if you're anything like John the Baptist, Jesus' baptism is a bit of a surprising and confusing moment, isn't it? Just before Jesus begins his ministry, his three years of public ministry, before any preaching or miracles, he's first baptized.

Why? Why do we have this passage? And why the Spirit? Why a voice from heaven? Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Well, to answer this, I want us to look at three key persons in this passage.

Three persons who are revealed in this baptism. The Son, the Spirit, and the Father. We're going to look at these three persons in this story, and when we do, we will see why this baptism happens and why it's so significant for us today.

But first, let's look at Jesus. Let's look at the Son, and this is my first point. The first thing to see, the Son. So just look at the scene in front of us. John the Baptist is in the wilderness of Judea, out in the sticks, middle of nowhere, probably central Israel to the east, because John's at the River Jordan.

[1 : 36] The River Jordan is this big river that runs north to south to the east of Israel. And so John is out in the middle of nowhere, and what's he been doing there? Well, it's the best job description in the world.

He's been preaching and baptising. It's the dream job. And look what he's been preaching. Verse 2. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And all sorts of folks are coming to him to be baptised. But what's this baptism all about? Well, look at verse 11. It's a baptism for repentance. And what were people doing when they were baptised? Verse 6. They were confessing their sins. This baptism is about being made right with God. Now, we don't need to think that this is a magical baptism that suddenly makes you sinless.

No, just like our baptism, this is an outward sign of what needs to happen to the heart. Our sins need to be washed, and we need to be made right with God.

[2 : 41] And that's because all of John's ministry here, all that John is doing in this wilderness, is to get people ready for something. For something big.

Verse 3. It's to prepare the way of the Lord. John knows that the Lord is coming. God Almighty is coming here to earth.

And so the heart of his message is, repent and be baptised. Your sins need to be dealt with. You need to be washed. Because God is coming. And when he comes, he's going to do something.

Verse 11. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He's talking about salvation and judgment here.

John washed with water, but when the Lord comes, he will bring true washing with the Spirit.

Salvation. But he will also bring fire upon the earth.

[3 : 45] Judgment. And so John has been saying, be prepared. And look who has been coming to him. Verse 5.

Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him. And they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Crowds have been flooding out to him in the east. Jerusalem, the capital, and then all the surrounding region. It's like people flocking from London and all the home counties and then all the southeast.

And they're all getting in their cars and they're all heading off to the wilderness on the east coast. What would that be? Essex, let's say. And this shows, this shows the spiritual state of Israel. The spiritual state of humanity. God is coming and we can't sit back. We can't ignore it. No, we need to be prepared.

[4 : 50] And that goes for all of us. God is coming and we need to be right with him. And so you have the crowds all queuing up along the bank of the River Jordan, eager to be baptised, confessing their sin, knowing the mess of their lives, cues of sinner after sinner after sinner.

And you can imagine them all lined up. And imagine if you could ask them their stories. They'd say, you'd find out he hasn't thought about God since he was a teenager.

She's been cheating on her husband. No one knows it, but he committed murder three years ago. He's full of lies. She's full of anger.

He's been worshipping another God. She's been living for herself. All of us could be in that queue. All these sinners preparing themselves for the Lord to come, bringing their sins, looking for God to wash them.

And as you look along and you reach the end of the queue, who joins to be baptised? You see Jesus Christ.

[6 : 13] Look at verse 13. Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptised by him. The sinless son of God, the saviour of the world, the spotless lamb, he joins the queue to be baptised for repentance.

But how can that be? Jesus is sinless. Hebrews tells us that that man at the end of the queue is without sin.

That man has no uncleanness, no spot or blemish or impurity. He has never and will never do any single thing wrong. So why is he there?

What's going on here? Well, John is as shocked as we are, isn't he? Verse 14. John would have prevented him saying, I need to be baptised by you and do you come to me?

Hold on, Jesus. I'm preparing the way for you. We're all getting ready for you. You're the Lord and you've come to be baptised by me. No, no, no.

[7 : 25] I need to be baptised by you. I need you to clean me. And look at Jesus' answer, verse 15. But Jesus answered him, let it be so now for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.

For John to baptise Jesus and for Jesus to join this queue and be baptised by John, this needs to happen because it fulfils all righteousness.

it's God's will that this should happen and to do God's will that is righteousness. This baptism fulfils God's big plan of salvation, his will.

John, if we are to be obedient to God right now, you need to baptise me and I need to receive that baptism. It's the righteous thing to do because this is God's plan that I should do this.

but why is being baptised, why is this God's plan of salvation? Well, it's because in this baptism, in joining this crowd, Jesus is publicly identifying with you.

[8 : 49] He is joining this queue of sinners numbered among them, washed in the same water as them to show he is identifying with you.

Jesus is identifying himself with the sinner here. He's saying, I'm with them. These sinners, I'm with them.

I'm walking the same footsteps as them, the same water as them. What they need to do, I will do as well. And not because he's a sinner, but because this is how he's going to save them.

This is Jesus being numbered with the transgressors. He's going to save them, he's going to bring the spirit of salvation to sinners by first identifying with them.

walking among us, knowing us, joining us, carrying our burdens. This is Jesus' first step on the road to the cross.

[9 : 59] The cross where he bore our sins, carried them, where he was identified with them. For our sake, God made him to be sin.

Jesus said, your sin will be put to my name. And your payment, I will pay. All that you need to do, I will do it for you.

If you need to die, I will die for you. If you need to suffer, I will suffer for you. And so if you need to be baptized, I will be baptized for you.

And so this baptism is the first step to the cross. The first step in identifying with you. As the water goes over him in the Jordan, we are publicly seeing and God is declaring, this is the sin bearer, the

one who will carry the sins of his people.

And it is through this, this is how he will bring the baptism of the Spirit. This is how he will bring salvation. He will be identified with sinners.

[11:12] can you see the sheer humility of Christ in this moment? Christ didn't stay up in heaven. He didn't stay up there just to keep his hands clean the whole time.

He didn't stand on the edge of earth avoiding the muck, staying ten feet away, saving us with a barge pole. No, he came down into the dirt, down into the water water to be numbered among sinners and to join this queue.

When we're making Christ known, maybe it's to our neighbours, our friends, maybe even family, when we're making Christ known, we don't run away from the sinner, do we?

We don't avoid those who need Christ. No, we go to them. We share our lives with them, don't we?

We spend time with them, we identify with them.

And why? Because that's what Christ did for us. If you think no one knows you, if you think no one cares about you or wants to be with you, think again.

[12:30] Jesus came to identify with you, to be numbered with you, to walk alongside you and carry your burdens. the Lord cares.

And if you don't know him, he wants to know you. This was God's will, his big plan of salvation, and Christ in all his humility, he came to be obedient to this task, to fulfill all righteousness.

So as we look at this scene, at the sun, in this river, why did Jesus need to be baptized, to be identified with you?

But there's more going on here, isn't there? A lot more. Jesus is not only baptized, but the spirit appears in this scene too. And so to appreciate what's going on here, we need to look at the next person in this scene, the spirit, the spirit.

Look what happens at his baptism, something remarkable, verse 16. 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.

[13:51] The heavens opened up, the sky parts, and something, someone comes down. The spirit of God descends on Christ, and he comes floating down like a dove.

Now we don't need to think that this is an actual dove with feathers. No, the spirit descends like a dove. He's in some visible form but descends in a dove-like way.

But that isn't what should catch our attention. No, pay attention to where he lands. The spirit of God descends and comes to rest on Jesus.

Now hearing this, it should make our ears tingle. It should make us remember a very special promise by God.

That God is going to send a saviour, the Messiah, the coming king, his chosen servant, and that servant will have the spirit of God upon him.

[14:54] Just listen to Isaiah 11 for a moment. Just listen to this. This is the promise of the Messiah written centuries before. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

In this moment, in this water, God is showing the world, this is the Messiah. This is the one who will save the world, to carry the sins of his people and be identified with them.

Now, we don't need to think that this is the first time Jesus had the spirit. Remember, he's conceived by the Holy Spirit in Matthew 1. The spirit is with him as soon as he's conceived, but this baptism is showing in public for all the world to see, and before Jesus enters his ministry, God is showing that this is the Messiah, and my spirit is with him.

All that he's about to do from now on, you need to realize he's doing this as the Messiah, and so all that he will do, his life, his ministry, his journey to the cross, his obedience, even to death, it will be done in the power of the spirit.

Jesus is truly God, he is the almighty God, but he's also truly man, and as man, he didn't rely on his own strength, he didn't live a godless existence just relying on his own human abilities, no, as a man, he relied on God, he relied on the Holy Spirit, and that doesn't make him any less of a human, that makes him the true human, we are designed to rely on God, we are made to have his spirit, and we see here Jesus is being the true man, one theologian helpfully said that the Holy Spirit was

Christ's inseparable companion, and so all that he did, all that he did fulfilling all righteousness, bearing our sin, achieving forgiveness, securing salvation, he does all that with the spirit, that's why in the next chapter we'll see it next week,

[17 : 27] Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness, the spirit is with Jesus every step of the way, and so you can imagine, as Christ is walking this earth, achieving all his work, the spirit is with him, gathering all the blessings of salvation as he goes, as Christ achieves forgiveness for his people, the spirit gathers that blessing in, as Christ is perfectly obedient, the spirit gathers in that righteousness, Christ achieves atonement, the spirit gathers that in, the resurrection, the spirit gathers that in, all of that now attached to the spirit, spirit, which means when Christ pours out that same spirit, when you get the Holy Spirit, what do you get?

You get all that Christ has achieved. When Christ baptizes you with his spirit, pours out his spirit on you, you get all the blessings of Christ, you get Christ.

This same spirit, the spirit who rested on Christ in the river Jordan, he, this spirit is given to you, which is why you need the Holy Spirit.

You need this Holy Spirit. Jesus had him, Jesus needed him, and this Holy Spirit has everything Christ has achieved, and so you need him.

If you've ever heard Presbyterians don't think the Holy Spirit is important, that is utter nonsense, okay? We are nothing without him.

[19 : 21] We are entirely lost without him. There is no salvation without the Holy Spirit. Kids, when you open up the suitcase of salvation, what does the letter H stand for?

Holy Spirit. God we need him. And it's when you follow the Lord Jesus, that's when he gives you his spirit. This same spirit, trust in him, and you get everything.

But there's one final person to see in this scene, or in fact one person we need to hear. It's the Father. And it's my third and final point, the Father. the Spirit comes down from heaven, but there's something else, isn't there?

A voice, verse 17. And behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. This is the voice of the Father.

Do you see that? He's saying, this is my beloved Son. I am the Father and this is my Son. You can open up textbooks about Jesus to hear what academics have to say about him.

[20 : 32] You can read history books to see what history has to say about Jesus. You can listen to the news or politicians to see what they think about Jesus, or you can hear straight from heaven to hear what God thinks of Jesus.

And it needs to stop us in our tracks. What does God think of this person in the River Jordan? This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

One of the most important questions that you can be asked, maybe the most important question, is who do you think Jesus is? And we can have all sorts of thoughts about that, all sorts of ideas about Jesus, but if you want the right answer about him, we need to ask, what does the Father think of Jesus?

us? And there's no mistake here, God is tearing open heaven and booming down with crystal clear voice to tell us without doubt, this is the Son of God and the Father delights in him.

Now, the Son of God, this is a really big full title. It's three words, but it means so much. It's kind of like saying, you know, saying Rafa Nadal is a good tennis player.

[21 : 59] Three words, yeah, sure, yeah, he is a good tennis player, but there's so much more that those three words mean, doesn't it? Well, the Son of God means a lot in the Bible.

Adam was called the Son of God. Israel, as a nation, was God's son. David, King David was called God's son. The second person of the Trinity is the eternal son of God.

The future king of Israel, who will rule over all the nations, he was promised to be the son of God.

The future Messiah would be called the son of God.

And so, ever since the fall, there has been this agonizing weight. Who will this true son of God be? When is he coming?

Well, when God tears open the heavens and that voice comes down, God is saying, finally, this is him. This is the second Adam.

[22 : 57] This is the beginning of a new creation. This is the true Israel. This is my king to rule over the whole world and he is perfect. I delight in him.

And so, let me ask you, is this the Jesus you know? this is this is why Jesus' baptism is so important. As Jesus enters into his ministry before he walks the road to the cross, God declares to the world who this man really is.

This is my son who has come to save the world. God will saved. And we must never forget what the father thinks of Jesus.

Whenever we get embarrassed or ashamed of how other people see Jesus, you know in that moment, when you know that moment is coming, in that conversation, and you know you're going to have to say, yes, I am a Christian.

or you know you're about to say, yeah, I really do believe in Jesus. And in that moment, we can be embarrassed to attach our name, ourselves to his name, can't we?

[24 : 09] We know how awkward we can feel, especially when people look down on us and hate us because of who Jesus is. In those moments, and this is important, in those moments, do not care what they think about Jesus.

Care about what the Father thinks about Jesus. The Father loves his Son. He is never anything to be ashamed of.

He is worthy. And when you have the Spirit, when Christ pours all that is his onto you, this is how the Father thinks of you.

When you are in Christ and God looks at you, he delights in you because of his Son. You are his child in whom he is well-pleased.

And so Christ has come to identify with us so that we can identify with him, so that the Father would love us along with him.

[25 : 17] And so will you come and follow him? will you come and know him? Because he's come down to know us. He's come down into these waters to know us, to be one of us.

So praise God. Jesus has come to identify with you. Let's pray. pray. Thank you.