

Acts 10:38

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[0 : 00] Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to teach God's word here today. I know that you're very accustomed to a Celtic accent from this lectern already so I hope that if I have one at all that it won't be too challenging.

There have been many happy coincidences here already in my visit, my first visit to IPC. I believe in coincidence. I just don't believe in mere coincidence.

And God is the ruler of all coincidences and it's been really good to be part of this service not least because of the free church connection.

But the happiest coincidence is really that I had intended to pitch this morning on a subject very closely related to the whole theme of baptism in the Bible.

And I want to begin at this point, although we're going to focus on the passage from Acts that was already read, I want to begin by reading about the baptism of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 3.

[1 : 09] So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew chapter 3 and we're going to read verses 13 to 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. And the words that I want to focus on are to be found in Acts chapter 10 and at verse 38.

Which is, I think, one of the best one-line summaries of the whole ministry of Jesus that we have anywhere in the New Testament.

[2 : 26] God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him. If you want a one-line summary of all the material of the four Gospels, there it is.

God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power as a consequence of which he went about doing good, healing those who were oppressed by the devil and God was with him.

I'm sure they're familiar words and I'm sure the context in which they are found is equally familiar.

They are spoken by the Apostle Peter in the course of a great sermon in the book of Acts.

Peter was a great preacher, not least in the book of Acts. And here he is preaching the Gospel. And the events that have led to this occasion are themselves remarkable and arresting.

[3 : 45] Peter is preaching in the home of Cornelius, who is a Roman centurion, a Roman soldier. The Bible describes him as a devout man who feared God with all his household and gave generously to the people and prayed continually to God.

And we're told that Cornelius had had a vision and God sent through Cornelius for Peter, who was 40 miles south in a place called Joppa, just because he was going everywhere preaching the Gospel.

And Peter too had had a remarkable supernatural vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of animals on it, clean and unclean.

And Peter was told to rise and kill and eat. But he responded instinctively, I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean, so I'm not going to do what you're asking.

And a voice said to him, Listen, what God has called clean or made clean, don't call common. And it's remarkable, it happened three times and then the vision disappeared.

[4 : 56] And Cornelius, in response to God, has sent men to Joppa for Peter and they come and they tell what has happened and Peter is taken then by them up to Joppa. And that story is so important in the book of Acts that it's referred to in the following chapter and again referred to in chapter 15.

Because it's all about the enlargement of the Gospel circle. That's really the theme of these chapters. As we were reminded in baptism, the Gospel came to Abraham and his descendants and it was very much identified with the nation that descended from Abraham.

But it was never God's intention to keep the light of the Gospel within the immediate, ordinary, natural family of Abraham.

Even in the covenant promise that God gave to Abraham, there was more than a passing hint that the Gospel would reach to the ends of the earth because of God's call of Abraham.

In fact, as one theologian puts it, the call of Abraham was a particular means for a universal end.

[6 : 12] It was the call of one man, a particular means through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. And if you are familiar with the Great Commission, at the close of Matthew's Gospel, go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, that is really simply the Christianizing of the Abrahamic promise.

It is, just to put a spin on words, it is the baptizing of the covenant promise in the name of Christ. Who is now bringing the covenant promise into its own and making that particular means of the Old Testament now to be fruitful to the ends of the earth.

So we are mandated to go into the whole world to pitch the Gospel because of that promise. But it took a while for the people of God in the New Testament era, after the resurrection of Jesus, just to realize what was happening.

And now God is directing the Gospel to be preached wonderfully and powerfully to the Gentiles. Which is why the Holy Spirit comes down on this occasion, just as he had come down on a previous occasion in Jerusalem.

The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Jerusalem. And then again in Samaria, where Peter was preaching. And now again in the household of Cornelius, where Peter again is preaching.

[7 : 49] The Gentile Pentecost of which we read here is simply reminding us of what Jesus said at the beginning of the Book of Acts, that the Gospel would be preached in his name beginning at Jerusalem, and then in Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

So the Spirit coming down at this point in the Book of Acts, in the household of Cornelius, is the marker that now the Gospel is going to be proclaimed all over the world.

And the purpose of the vision that Peter saw was that these unclean Gentiles were no longer regarded so in God's scheme of things. So now Peter comes and he preaches the Gospel.

He tells them about Jesus. And about the good news that God gave first of all to Israel, verse 36, and then through Jesus Christ, you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed.

Here is our text. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, you know this, with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and so on. Now, I suppose that I'm coming here today, preaching this message, and I can say, you know this.

[9 : 06] If you don't know this, then listen carefully. If you do know this, then listen carefully.

Because every one of us needs this great message of the Gospel that is personalized in Jesus and that is proclaimed in His Word and in His Gospel all over the world.

We need it. We are all sinners before God. We need the good news of God's salvation. And it is, for us, wrapped up and bound up in the person and in the work of Jesus Christ.

And in this summary, Peter is really emphasizing two things, isn't he? He's telling us, first of all, what God did to Jesus. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

And then he's telling us what God did through Jesus. As a consequence of that anointing, Jesus went about doing good and healing because God was with him.

So I want, very simply, to think about these two things today. What God did to Jesus and what God did through Jesus. So what did God do to Jesus?

[10 : 25] God, we are told, anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Now, one of my interests in coming to this statement is to see what it is telling us about God himself.

It is about the gospel. But the gospel is rooted in the doctrine of God who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

We were reminded of that in baptism too. Baptizing them in the name singular of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We only have one God. There is only one God. God, our God, is numerically one. But the Christian name of God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

It is a great mystery. It is a mystery around which our finite minds cannot wrap themselves. But here is the remarkable thing of the unfolding revelation of the scriptures that when one person of the Godhead, that is the Son of God, when he becomes man, when he takes our nature in addition to his own, so that now he appears, this divine person appears in the world, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, these two distinct natures in this one person forever, when he becomes man, he enlarges our understanding of the triune God.

[12:08] it takes the incarnation of one person of the Trinity to enlarge our understanding of who God actually is, that God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

No one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has shown God and revealed God to us.

and in his incarnation we see the glory of God as Father and Son and Holy Spirit. And actually that is what undergives this remarkable statement of Peter's in Acts 10.38.

Who is doing the anointing? Well, God is doing the anointing. He's the subject of the verbo. Who is being anointed?

Jesus of Nazareth is being anointed. And who is he? According to the testimony of scripture, he is himself God. He was in the beginning with God and in the beginning and now and always is God.

[13:24] So God is anointing. God in the person of Jesus is being anointed and with whom is God anointing God.

He's anointing him with the Holy Spirit. And who or what is the Holy Spirit? Is that just some kind of ephemeral power that operates in human experience?

Well, not at all. the Holy Spirit is also God. The testimony of scripture is that the language that applies to the Father and applies to the Son also applies to the Holy Spirit.

One God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. And God the Father, according to the testimony of Peter, anoints God the Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth with God the Holy Spirit and with power.

So this remarkable phenomenon, this remarkable fact of the anointing of Jesus actually shows us the whole Godhead at work for us and for our salvation.

[14:35] And when does that anointing take place? Well, it takes place at the point of Jesus' baptism, at the inaugural point of his public ministry.

He had had the Holy Spirit right from the very beginning of his existence in the world. Through the Holy Spirit, he is conceived in the womb of his mother, he is filled with the Spirit without measure, he is a spiritual man, this Son of Mary.

But at his baptism, he receives the Spirit by way of anointing. Now, that itself is remarkable, that itself draws on a whole trajectory of Old Testament teaching and theology.

Because in the Old Testament, all the important functionaries and officials and office bearers of God's covenant and God's kingdom, they were anointed.

There was a recipe given to Moses for the making of special anointing oil. It had to be done God's way, engineered God's way, and it could be used for no other purpose but to be poured out on the head of kings and priests and prophets who would function in an official capacity for God's people and for God's service.

[16:00] And now, drawing on that remarkable strand of Old Testament teaching, this is what I read about Jesus. He is anointed. God anoints him, not with specially created oil, because that oil, like so much else in the Old Testament, only spoke of something greater and signified something greater.

He is anointed with the Holy Spirit and he needs to be anointed because he too has come to be an official and a functionary and an office bearer for God in God's kingdom and for God's people.

And he's beginning a public ministry of three years that will culminate in the cross and for this ministry Jesus of Nazareth is set apart and he's equipped and empowered with this outpouring at his baptism in the River Jordan.

So there is the closest connection between Peter's statement and the baptism of Jesus. Now let's just go there for a moment because that's a remarkable occasion isn't it?

When Jesus comes to the River Jordan to be baptized by John. Well what's happening at the River Jordan? John has been preaching all about sin and the need for repentance and turning away from sin and trusting in God and people have been convicted of their sin and they come now to the Jordan to be baptized.

[17 : 36] A baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So if you can just imagine that for a moment in the River Jordan there is John the Baptist and he's baptizing people who have come to hate their sin and they want to get rid of their sin.

They don't want to live in sin any longer or for sin any longer. They want to find sin put away. And into this drama of the crowd in the Jordan comes Jesus.

I want that baptism too. Well you can understand why John said no I'm not going to baptize you. You have no sin.

I'm the sinner I need to be baptized by you. Why are you coming to me? Here is this remarkable Jesus of Nazareth who had committed no sin for which repentance was necessary.

It's one of the great things isn't it? I have a savior who is absolutely flawless, blameless, sinless.

There was no fault in this man, no guile in his mouth, there was no action on his part that could not be defended in the light of God's word and God's law.

[18 : 56] There was not one word of his tongue that he wished he could recall, there was not one thought in his mind that was impure, not one motive in his heart of self interest.

Everything that he was, everything that he could be was committed entirely to God to do your will, I take delight. That's how he came into the world.

By that will, says the writer to the Hebrews, you are sanctified. Because he came down from heaven to do the will of the God who sent him. Do you know today your entire salvation and your perseverance in grace and your entrance into glory at last all hinges on the uncompromised obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so he is perfect and sinless and flawless and he does not need to repent. And yet here he is at the Jordan numbered among the transgressors standing where sinners are standing coming into these waters where sinners are wanting to be baptized.

What's he doing there? He doesn't need to be there. He doesn't need to repent. But you see, they want to get rid of their sins. And he comes in order to take their sins on.

[20 : 24] He comes to be identified with them and numbered among them because he's going to bear these sins at last in his body to the key of Calvary.

And that's going to be for him a different kind of baptism by his own admission when he offers himself without spot through the eternal spirit to God.

And for this task he needs an anointing. He needs a public declarative empowering from heaven both to show that he is God's savior and to show that he is the sinner's savior.

And actually in a remarkable way if you want to defend the uniqueness of Jesus and therefore the uniqueness of Christianity the stand aloneness of the gospel you know that Christ is the only way to God because God anointed him.

There's a sense in which anointing means means pointing It's almost as if when God anoints someone he points to him.

[21 : 54] He anoints a king he points to the king that's my chosen king. When he anoints a priest he points to him. And the oil of anointing drips off the finger of God onto the head of the official and God says this is my man.

And that's what's happening at Jordan among other things. God is pointing at Jesus of Nazareth and the pointing is in the anointing and God is saying this is my man.

So I look at all the religions of the world with all the promised saviors and all the offers of salvation that these religions give me and I say but God hasn't pointed to any of them.

God only ever pointed at Jesus. And if I want to get to God and find my way to heaven I can't go looking around the marketplace of religions and simply choosing the one that appeals to me.

It's no use me pointing out the religion that I think will get me to God. I need God to point out the way to himself. And that's what he does at the Jordan.

[23 : 09] magnificently publicly declaring this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. You want a savior?

I give you a savior. I'm pointing at Jesus of Nazareth. Actually God had been pointing to him all through the Old Testament. And now the great words of Isaiah come into their own.

Do you remember these great declarative words of God in chapter 42 of Isaiah? Behold my servant whom I uphold, my elect one in whom my soul delights.

I have put my spirit upon him. And the gospel writers recognize that now in Christ these words have their fulfillment and at the Jordan God is anointing Jesus of Nazareth and saying behold my servant whom I uphold.

And what happens at the Jordan? God, God the Father, whom we hear but whom we do not see, he says this is my son.

[24 : 19] And Jesus, the son of God, in the rivers of Jordan with his robes dripping from the water of the river, we see him and hear him and he wears the anointing and carries the anointing with all the dignity of God's great king and God's promised Messiah and God's great saviour, his only Christ, with the Holy Spirit whom we see but do not hear as he descends in the form of a dove.

And in that one action of anointing, Father and Son and Holy Spirit are engaged for us and for our salvation.

It's remarkable. It's actually one of the greatest moments of the revelation of the triune God of Scripture.

In this remarkable spot of baptism that becomes the inauguration of the ministry in public of Jesus of Nazareth who has been concealed from our view up until this time but now the heavens are opened.

Remarkable word actually that is used of the veil of the temple when Jesus dies, the same word, torn apart so that the Spirit will come down on the head of Jesus and at last he's going to die so that through the open veil we will enter into heaven.

[26 : 06] So what does God do for Jesus? To Jesus? He anoints him with the Holy Spirit and with power. And I want you to see one of two things in that great act of anointing.

I want you to see how serious sin actually is. What will wash away my sin?

What will get rid of the stain on my conscience? The shedding of my blood won't do it. The reformation of my life won't do it.

Filling my mind with good doctrine won't do it. What is going to deal with my sin? Sin is such an immovable object that it actually requires the combined weight of the three persons of the Godhead to act together in a confederacy and to work covenantally for me and for my salvation.

God God the father will not send God the son if God the son will not come into the world to be a savior if God the Holy Spirit will not be willing to be poured out by one person onto the head of another person if this doesn't happen I will not and cannot ever be saved.

[27 : 32] My sin is of such magnitude that God literally must move heaven and earth in order that I might be atoned for and reconciled and my sin dealt with.

And that's exactly what he does. In eternity past God God not simply in his oneness not simply in his undifferentiated oneness but in the unity and fullness of his triune being covenanted to save sinners.

God said to the son you go. He had said to man in paradise at the very beginning when Adam sinned he had said to man go out of paradise into the wilderness world you've made.

But he said it to his own son too go out of paradise into that wilderness world and God sends the only begotten son into the far country to rescue prodigal sons who had wandered far away from him.

And so the son comes I'm in the world he says in John's gospel as the one sent. I'm here as the one sent. I came but I came as the missionary.

[29 : 04] I came as the one who was given the command to go not by way of banishment but by way of rescue to save sinners and so the son of God appears and he needs the empowering and anointing of the Holy Spirit for that task and I come before this great moment and this great fact of revelation and I realize that for the salvation of me in my sin it takes the whole of God to move don't ever think that it's an easy thing to get to heaven it took heaven to come to earth for that to be remotely possible and on earth it now takes the engagement of the triune God to make it actual and real and when I get to heaven it will be in praise of father son and holy spirit who acted in this way and cooperated in this covenant of redemption for me and for my salvation my praise today is of

Jesus because in him is concentrated the entire work of God so I want you to see the seriousness of sin but I want you to see too the sovereignty of grace I want you to see that here is God willing to do all that is necessary for you and your salvation here is God the father willing to send his son he

did not spare him says Paul in Romans I could think of any number of reasons why he might have spared him why he might have kept his beloved son back from the hell of Calvary back from the bitterness of the cup that he had to drink back from the curse of judgment that is poured out on my head he has done nothing worthy of death but he didn't spare!

a human body didn't spare him the infinitesimally small space in which he is incarnated in the womb of Mary didn't spare him the sufferings of this world didn't spare him the ignominy of a bad reputation we were not born of immorality said the Pharisees we know that Mary wasn't married when you were conceived we were not born of immorality God didn't spare him the shame of that disgrace that reputation so ill deserved so ill founded God didn't spare him the loneliness of long nights God didn't spare him the sufferings of friendless days God didn't spare him the experience of betrayal it's a terrible thing to betray a friend God didn't spare!

His son that experience didn't spare him the sufferings of the garden didn't spare him at last from the cross no he delivered him he was willing to do that and the son willing to come willing to have a veil drawn over his glory didn't stand on his own rights as Philippians 2 puts it didn't say I'll come into the world unconditioned that they recognize me for the God I am he didn't come into the world insisting that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he was Lord came into the world with a veil covering his glory so that if you met him on the street you would not know who he really was but he was willing to empty himself willing to be humbled even to the death of the cross and the

Holy Spirit willing to come in the councils of redemption from all eternity the father sent the son said to the son go will you go yes I'll go said to the Holy Spirit are you willing to go down not by the road of humiliation the son of God the second person he's going to come down and be humbled in doing so the Holy Spirit is going to come down but not so as to be humbled his glory is not veiled in fact the simplicity of the moment is so remarkable as the dove!

[34 : 14] waters of judgment had already engulfed the word and a dove appeared to say all is well and now in the form of a dove the Holy Spirit comes down to say all is well to empower and equip this saviour for the task ahead of him and he is willing to come God is willing to come if there is any reason at all why you are not a Christian today it's on your part it's not on God's part because he's willing to save you look at what he did he anointed Jesus with power by the Holy Spirit all that was necessary was done and I want you to see to not just the sovereignty of grace but the sheer sufficiency of

God's atoning work what more is needed than this it's all here God has done all that is necessary well the time is moving on that's what God did to Jesus he anointed him with his spirit and his power what did God do through Jesus just in a moment number one he went about doing good I love the simplicity of that statement Jesus went about he didn't just stay at Jordan or Nazareth or Galilee he went about he was here there and everywhere he was in different places went into different situations I tell you he is still going about in the gospel he is still going about he is going about through Scotland and England and Ireland and Wales he is going about through London and Lewis he is going about through Europe and Asia and America he is still going about and where he goes he does!

He only ever always did good they couldn't see it could they crucified him between malefactors that's the old version for the translation people who had done evil malefactors and yet all the time he had been the great benefactor he had only done good and they crucified him between people who did evil but you ask any Christian in here today what did Jesus ever do for you nothing but good nothing but good sometimes we think in our foolishness that we need to get good things from him to know that he's doing good to us but that's not the case is it you know that sometimes he sends difficult things bad things but he only ever sends good things even when they are wrapped up in difficult wrapping there are blessings even in these difficulties he goes about doing good you need

Jesus to get the good and he went about healing those who were oppressed by the devil well he himself was attacked by the devil as soon as he came out of the waters of baptism he entered into the waters of temptation and conflict with the devil he had actually come to destroy the devil's kingdom and in a sense from the moment of his anointing he is on the attack against the devil isn't he the prince of the world is coming that's what he says as he looks out of the upper room towards the cross the great battle is about to be fought he is going to meet the devil to topple him definitively from his throne that he might rule no longer in the lives of men and women Jesus is still attacking

the devil according to Hebrews the son of God was manifest in order to destroy the works of the devil to destroy him that had the power of death that is the devil so my dear friends today every time the gospel is preached every time you pray for your loved ones every time you witness to Jesus Christ you are engaged in the conflict of the ages and Jesus is still through the gospel healing those who are oppressed! by the devil and even when his people are the object of Satan's attacks and Satan's ambush he says I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail and he's still healing those who are oppressed by the devil and through Jesus says Peter the presence of God was manifest God was with him and you can have all the assurance in the world today that in Christ God will be with you too until the day comes when at last he will take his people home and through the great work of the triune God we shall go to be with him and then we shall know only good and be finally healed and the

[40 : 15] God of peace will crush Satan under our feet shortly all because the triune God is our saviour in Christ and I want to know today is he your saviour you need to be in him we call him Christ because that means anointed I love the words of the Heidelberg Catechism where it describes Christ as the anointed one and then asks so why are you called Christian he's called Christ because he's anointed why are you called Christian because you share in his anointed and in him you too have the Holy Spirit and in him you are complete and in him you will know the blessing and the power of

God's salvation complete in Christ and if you're not a Christian today you look to Jesus you need to get out of yourself and into him you need to be united to him by grace through faith and that is all our salvation and I hope all our desire we would see Jesus the anointed Christ of God to whom God points today and says you need a savior I give you Jesus of Nazareth through the power of the spirit offering himself without spot to God that you might be saved Amen let's pray