

Jesus' Baptism

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] I'd like us to return today to the chapter that we read together in Luke's Gospel, Luke's Gospel chapter 3, and the unique but nonetheless appropriate passage or passage that speaks about the unique baptism of Jesus Christ.

And in this passage which follows on from the chapters before that over the last two weeks James has been looking at, we realise that Dr Luke here is building up a picture of the credentials of Jesus as the Messiah.

And he's making clear step by step that Jesus is the Messiah, is the Savior, is the Anointed One, that for us today is significance, good for us to have that step by step appointment and recognition of the appointment of Jesus Christ and his credentials as the Messiah.

And there's no doubt about the fact that Jesus had the right connections in order to be the Messiah. And that's very important for us as we think about who Jesus is and what our need is, our need is for forgiveness and our need for redemption and our need for the life of God to be breathed into us so that we can be friends of his, so that we can get to heaven.

And we know from this passage and also from what Luke has been hinting at and unfolding in the previous verses and chapters that he is indeed the Son of God. We've got that verifying voice from heaven.

[1 : 41] This is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased and we've seen the hints of that divine sonship being unpeeled in the previous chapters where we are reminded of Jesus Christ who's born of the Virgin Mary, this fanfare from heaven that accompanied his birth and his own early days which spoke of him and his uniqueness and his link with heaven.

And here it is made more firm in its declaration with this voice from heaven which we'll look at a little bit more later on. But this is Jesus Christ who's been baptized here, the Son of God in all his power, in all his glory, with all his authority.

That is our Redeemer, that is our Savior. You see, without this Jesus, without Jesus who is God, then we have no Savior. We have no baptism. We have no worship.

We have no hope of heaven. It's no good that Jesus is gentle, meek and mild in his humanity, unless he is also God, because he cannot be our Savior, unless he is divine, unless he is God. So the connections or the credentials maybe we could say are being made clear, being unfolded here. He's the Son of God and he is the Son of Man. That is, he is a human. We've seen that before.

[3 : 09] We've been looking at that in our study of the Trinity and we see here in his genealogy that we're given here the genealogy of Jesus, grounding him, fixing him in humanity, so that not only is he God and is able to save and redeem his people, but he is a human being and can adequately represent us and can be our Savior, because he can be our substitute, because he took flesh and blood, which we have seen and have looked at before recently.

And Jesus Christ grounds himself here with a family on this family day, with a heritage, with roots, with parents and grandparents and great-grandparents and ancestors, taking him right back, belonging, rooted, grounded in real people as a real human being, umbilically linked to humanity as a real human, as well as being God.

Now, this genealogy, which we're not going to spend time on, but we recognize it, maybe if you're a fairly close scholar of the Scriptures, you'll notice it's quite different from the one that's given in Matthew. It's longer.

It comes from the other end. It doesn't start with Abraham, it starts with Joseph, and it's got many more names included and some different names.

I'm not going to spend any time on that other than to say that there's many commentators that would argue that the Matthewing account is the genealogy of Joseph, and this account is potentially or possibly the genealogy of Mary.

[5 : 03] We can't say for certainty. But what we are clear of is a covenantal line that takes us to Jesus, a promissory line from God right through that covers all the Old Testament covenants, from the covenant with Adam through to Noah and to David, to Abraham and to David, and through to Christ, the great Son of David.

And we're reminded that the first Adam is linked in here with Jesus, who is the last Adam. And our first representative is also spoken of at the beginning of the genealogy with our last representative, Christ, Adam, the last Adam being our Redeemer and our Savior.

And surely even this terminology, these words, these names remind us and speak to us of promise fulfilled, that this is the Messiah who God has been promising since before.

This is the very beginning of the world that He's been promising, this one who would come and crush the serpent's head and who would bring us salvation and redemption. This is the God who has fulfilled His Word, who hasn't lied, who doesn't let us down, and who has brought to us this Savior of promise, Jesus Christ, who has come to redeem us.

And it also speaks of realism, this family line, this realistic flesh and blood Savior, who is doubly, can we say, not sure if we can say it theologically, but we can say it pragmatically, that He's doubly the Son of God.

[6 : 48] In His Trinitarian divine nature, He's the Son of God as a Son of Adam. And we recognize that He is a worthy and a just and a good and a perfect and a unique Savior for us because of these credentials.

So we recognize that Jesus Christ, indeed to the right connections that Luke is pointing out and bringing to our attention here. He's also the Savior who had the right support.

And this is important for us as we unfold as well, that He is not a maverick Savior, but that He is the Savior in the right way, with the right support of whom we can in many ways also in our lives take comfort from and learn from.

As He comes to this baptism, we see that already at this stage, Luke is recording for us that he's praying, that Jesus is praying, because he is learning throughout his young life this dependent, obedient, prayerful support on his Father.

He is linking himself, even as God's Son, to his Father through prayerful connection all the time. He is finding his support from heaven.

[8 : 07] Now Jesus Christ is the most perfect human being who ever lived. But can I say something else? So He is the most human person who ever lived.

There's no one who's been more human than Jesus Christ in many ways. And this is how He chose to live in prayerful support and dependence of His Father.

And what a great example that is to us as believers today, how empty and dishonouring our lives are if they are devoid of prayer, if we are not in contact with our heavenly Father through Christ Jesus, if we aren't dependent on Him, if we aren't supported by Him, if we are living in independent lives, no time for God, no time for prayer, no time for dependence.

This is the perfect Son of God who in His learned obedience, as He went through this life as our redeemer and to be our substitute, lived in supported prayerful dependence upon His Father.

And in return as it were, the Father gives evidence of His great approval. You are My Son, a voice came from heaven. Who My love with you, I am well pleased.

[9 : 27] And this is a marvellous Trinitarian moment where we have in a sense the cooperative seal of approval from the Godhead for the work of Jesus and for what He has come to do.

We have the voice of God and we have the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove to empower Jesus Christ.

And it's just a reminder to us today, a tremendously significant reminder to us that salvation and the name of Jesus who we call on today, the baptism that we will be engaged in later on, our Christian lives are all, their genesis is in God, that God Himself in His divine psyche gave approval to the work of salvation, that God was behind it wholeheartedly and completely.

Jesus choosing to be baptized and associated with us in our sinful nature, we'll see in a minute. The Spirit empowering, God the Father giving His approval. It's this great divine sense of yes, this is right, this is the way, this is salvation.

It will be as relevant in 2008 in St. Columba as it was at this time and as it has always been. [10:54] It is always relevant, there is no change. This is God's smile of approval. The sun that shines today with a smile of approval on this day and on His salvation and on the work of Jesus Christ and of the Father's approval. And in Christ we're told we're clothed in Christ as Christians, we're covered in Jesus Christ's righteousness. That's important because we recognize and see and baptism and the washing of baptism speaks about it too, that God's disposition has changed towards us in Christ.

It's changed from a disposition of wrath to a disposition of pleasure so that as He looks down on you and me as Christians covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, He can say to us, you're my sons, you're my daughters in whom I am well pleased.

He has that same pleasure in us through Jesus Christ and through what He has done. That Christ allows us to enjoy because He's taken away the wrath of our sin and our guilt and our being under God's judgment and all that goes with that. It reminds us in all its pleasure of the solemnity of being out of Jesus Christ, of being happy to sit out of Christ, not being a Christian, not dealing with our souls and not hearing and knowing and understanding and experiencing the divine pleasure through the salvation that He offers.

It speaks then of the Father's approval, Jesus having the right support, and of course it also speaks of the strength, the Holy Spirit, strength that is imbued on to Christ, that is given, that is instilled into Jesus Christ in order for Him to fulfill His role.

We're told that the dove, Holy Spirit descends on Him in bodily form like a dove. Why a dove? Well, we aren't told. It could be because of symbolism with purity or its gentleness.

[13:03] It could be one of these things, but we recognize and know its characteristics to reflect the work and the person and the kind of gentleness of the Holy Spirit in His work in salvation.

And so the Spirit fills Jesus Christ from this point on in His human nature to empower Him, to give Him the strength to immediately, if you'll notice in the next chapter, immediately face Satan in temptation to overcome that and to be strong to do so, and then to fulfill His public ministry and go to the cross.

Now can I just give a little aside here at this point? It does seem clear, certainly to me here, that the whole moment, the whole couple of verses here that are given to us by Luke seem to be given, among other things, to cater for Jesus' humanity.

His flesh and bloodness, can I say. Just as baptism as a sacrament is given for us in our humanity, as a symbol, as a sign, something tangible, helps us to understand, you know, water that we can feel and speaks about cleansing and purity. And tonight as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, He's given us a sacrament that we will touch, that we will pass on to one another, that will symbolise the unity, the oneness, the bread, the poured out blood, that speaks about sacrifice in very tangible human ways, very evidential ways for us.

He's given us these things because we know we need them in our Christian lives. And here, His Jesus Christ in His humanity and in His prayerful humanity, given very tangible physical reminders and encouragements of what He is about to do, the physicality of Him going down into the water, and what that meant in terms of association and cleansing and being with God's people. The audible voice from heaven that He could hear, that would assure Him in His humanity of who God was, and the visibility of the dove that He could see descending from heaven, touching Him, almost as if it's the touch, and the voice of God, assuring Him and preparing Him and readying Him for the work that He was about to do.

[15:34] The Holy Spirit, given this wonderfully gentle moment to empower Him as He moves on in His work, as we'll see briefly in a moment.

God's, but God's power, descending on Jesus Christ for the work, power to defeat Satan, power to obey, power to face the accusations of Pilate, power to overcome the abuse and the betrayal of His closest friends, power to go to the cross, to carry the cross, to face the nails, and to face the wrath of God, and the onslaught of Satan and the power of the grave, and the strength of resurrection to remind us that the work is done.

We can't come near that. Do you really think, do you really think that we can be saved in our own strength, in our own merits, in our own efforts, when it required the third person of the Trinity to indwell the Son in such miraculous and glorious ways to empower Him to be our Savior?

Are we happy to go and face God on that day of judgment on our own scene? I've tried my best. I've been my hardest. I've been trying my hardest. I've been as honest as I can be.

And I don't think my sins really did place you on the cross. I don't think they really were as bad as you make out. I think in my own strength, I can justify my place in heaven.

[17 : 30] Do we think that in the light of what is spoken of here today? Surely not. That great power that is given to God, that great gentleness and yet that great condescending care for Jesus to remind Him that this is God's will, this is the way to go.

Isn't it great that God deals with Jesus in this way, because He often deals with us in that same way, that same gentle understanding, compassionate, long-suffering, patient way in our case, in our slowness to understand. It wasn't that Jesus was slow to understand.

But we are, and God deals with us. We saw that. I think those of us who were at the Bible study on Wednesday night doing Gideon, how condescending and gracious and gentle God was with Gideon in giving Him all these signs in assuring Him and in helping Him.

May we reflect on the compassionate nature of our God too, and all He gives us in Providence and in grace to gently woo us to Himself, bring us into the kingdom.

Please remember that, particularly if you have not yet made your peace with Jesus Christ, if you have not been yet washed by Jesus Christ and have not taken Him to be your Savior.

[18 : 53] We have seen the right support, and we also see it was the right time. This baptism was exactly at the right time. We are told Jesus Himself was about 30 years old when He began His ministry.

This was the right time. It was the right time for Him to begin His ministry. Not when He was 16, not when He was 23, but about 30 years old. It was the perfect time at this public baptism to begin His work. We are told in 1 Chronicles 23 that the levitical priests began their ministry in the temple at the age of 30 years old.

And before doing so, they were washed, they were cleansed. And it may well be that the baptism of Jesus here had portance to that as it looked back on His high priestly work that He had come to do. He was going to be a representative. He was going to stand before us before God. He was going to be the one who would stand in our place. And of course, Jesus wouldn't offer the blood of a goather of a lamb. He would offer His own blood as the Lamb of God, the great sacrifice for His people.

It was the right time as the high priest, which came to its pinnacle just three years later, didn't it?

And on the cross, when the curtain was ripped in two from top to bottom, so that access into the Holy of Holies was made open to all who come through Jesus Christ.

[20 : 24] As the great... Indeed, so that we can all claim to be priests. So today we are all priests.

The priesthood of all believers, we can have direct access into God's presence through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Thirty years old. David was 30 years old when he assumed the kinship. Joseph was 30 years old when he became Prime Minister. The priests were 30 years old when they took up their work. Jesus is 30 years old and it's a good symbolic, important time for Him to begin this public ministry.

And it's a public baptism, isn't it, at this time? I was Jesus baptized. He wasn't a sinner. He didn't need to repent of anything, did He? No, of course He didn't.

It wasn't a declaration of His guilt, but it is a reminder to us of the prophecy in Isaiah 53 that He was numbered with the transgressors, that He associated with sinful human beings.

There was a mark of solidarity in His baptism because He was publicly assuming the task of being the Messiah.

[21 : 38] And to be the Messiah, He was the representative and He was going to die in their place. He would take on their sins. He would bear their burdens and His baptism is a recognition of that.

So this baptism today speaks to you, if you're a Christian and me, that Jesus here says, I'm willing. I'm willing to be your Savior. I'm willing to die in your place. I'm willing to be regarded as a sinner who is going to be punished for sins in your place.

Our bat out, our shadows and prefigures, our baptism in Jesus' name. A baptism in repentance and faith and in covenant confidence, a baptism that we share with our children in Jesus' name.

So it was the right time as He assumed this public role. See up till now, we don't really know anything about Jesus. This is His public ministry beginning, the mark being His baptism and the approval of God here.

And the three years that follow are three years of intense messianic work. So very briefly, can I say in application today that we give thanks to God.

[22 : 51] We give thanks to God that we have here a picture of our determined Savior. Savior that was determined to be born in the womb of Mary, determined to live as a child, obey His parents, be anonymous, and yet come to this point of public declaration and determination to go to the cross, the only man who was ever born to die.

The determination backed up by the approval of God and the strengthening of the Holy Spirit, of the backing of covenantal grace, of the promises from the covenant from the beginning through the Old Testament, a determined Savior.

Thank God today that we have a determined Savior that has brought us to this point. Also thank God for the glory of these covenantal promises that were given right through the Old Testament, that were pictured in the Old Testament through the redemption from slavery of God's people, and which have been brought to fruition in Jesus Christ.

We'll look tonight a bit more about that great sealing in the blood of Jesus that the Passover speaks of, and it points forward to the Lord's Supper. And these great covenantal promises that embrace the families of believers in God.

We rejoice in these things. We also rejoice in the centrality today of family. Isn't it crucial to God? Crucial to God's structure for society.

[24 : 30] Crucial to God's structure for children, for grace, for blessing, for privilege. This great framework in which grace flourishes, it's not bound by, but grace flourishes within that family covenantal framework.

And Christ born into family with a genealogy of family, and lots of family links and lots of family connections, so that even today it's His cousin who is baptising Him here, unwillingly in a sense baptising Him, feeling Him a sense of unworthiness as He is unable to tie the laces of this great Messiah.

The centrality of family and covenantal promises. And in covenantal responsibilities as parents today, great hope of a faithful God, grace cascading down through the generations.

That's what we look for, isn't it? That's what we look for here. Not exclusively. We want God to convert people from all over the place. But we do have this great focus and this great, caring all this great hub where God promises to bless through covenantal blessings of family, and through the privileges of grace being shared by parents to their children, and by example, not only of parents, but of family.

I want to say a bit more about that, just when we deal with the baptism today. So we do give thanks for Jesus' baptism. We have thanks for all that it means, for all that it is to us, for all that it speaks of, and how beautifully it will be seen today.

[26 : 29] It's implications, or the implications of Jesus' willingness to be our Savior. We see the implications of that very clearly today in Michael's baptism.

Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Lord God, we thank You for this day. We give thanks for this privilege. We give thanks for Jesus Christ. Lord God, how we long for Your Spirit to be poured out on us in greater and greater measure.

That we would see Your Wordiness, that we would see the glory of Your salvation, its timelessness, its relevance, its effectiveness for us.

That we would not stay away from Jesus, that we would not think Him irrelevant or unimportant or insignificant, or that we would not be mindless, but they would be vibrant, passionate, committed believers, and committed in searching for Christ, that we would find Him.

And all the solace of finding Him would change our perspective and our hope and transform our hearts and our desires. And made today, we evidence that change in our unity for one another in Christ.

[27 : 45] For the passion with which we will sing and worship You. And for the reality of our faith and our support and our prayerful consideration for our baptized family today.

Continue with us we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.