

The Baptism of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] And this is an amazing part of the Gospel, it's an amazing part of the Gospel account, because it's about the coming of Jesus, and we think much about the coming of Jesus at this time of year.

And it's significant, and often we fail to recognise that, there's a great significance in these events, because they come after an amazing silence from God.

For over 400 years God didn't speak to His people. There was complete silence. The people were abandoned and they felt lost and they felt alone.

And they wondered whether God still existed and whether God still cared, and whether they were still God's people. And then all of a sudden we have this prophet in the desert, John.

The prophet that those who knew their Old Testaments would have known was prophesied, and some who recognised and thought that he would have been the Elijah that was promised.

[0 : 5 9] And along with that, in this account, we have the voice of God Himself. This is my beloved Son, with whom I'm well pleased. So following 400 years of silence, we have this amazing break into their understanding of God, with John the prophet, and with the voice, the unmistakable voice of God, and the message of God that the Kingdom is coming.

The Messiah that has been prophesied that you've been looking for, that the channel of prophecy has been considering, is coming and has come and will come even more so.

It's the moment that very clearly grace breaks into our desperate world, in very clear overtones. We have Jesus Christ coming and coming in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

And God speaks very, very powerfully through the incarnation, the life of Jesus and His death and resurrection, and I want us to consider the question, today are we listening?

Are we listening for the voice of God? You come to church, do you expect to hear the voice of God speaking through His Word? His living Word?

[2 : 2 0] His Word that His Spirit breathes life into? Do you expect to be challenged by Him? Do you expect your life to be different and changed?

Do you expect to go out today different from how you came in, having heard the challenge from God's Word, having been in worship with God's people in this special act, that reminds us of heaven and is a forerunner and a pointer forward towards heaven?

Do we expect these? Have we come with any sense of expectation today? There was great expectation in John's time. Thousands of people as we'll see came to hear and to be baptized.

Tremendous buzz of expectation. I just sometimes wonder in our faces, in our body language, in the way we listen, in the way we walk into church and leave church, whether we have a spirit of expectation.

But this is just a day of small things. God no longer speaks. We just come to church, the ritual is ours. It's just part of my culture, part of what I do.

[3 : 36] Are we expecting God? Before these next few Sunday mornings, I want to look, I'm going to reverse, go back in order in the start today, because it's significant with the birth of baptism of Jesus.

And then next week I'm hoping to preach God willing on a subject I've never, I don't think I've ever heard a sermon on, the boyhood of Jesus. And then on Christmas morning to look at the birth of Jesus.

So the baptism, the boyhood and the birth. So we're reversing. We're going back towards the birth of Jesus at this incarnational time when we think about his coming into the world.

But I also want to go the other way today. I want to regress, I want to go into reverse gear towards his birth over these next few Sundays. What I also want to do is I want to go forward today and see the progression through this kind of story of baptism, what's happening as John comes and then as Jesus is baptized and what that means for ourselves today as we witness a baptism today, to witness David's baptism in our congregation today.

This is a progressive story and I want simply to begin by speaking about what baptism or what the people who went out to see John would have expected. Did they have any concept of baptism?

[4 : 59] Did they know anything about baptism? What was happening? There's very little told to us about their idea, their knowledge of the Jewish people, the people in Judea, what kind of knowledge they had of baptism prior to John.

But it's clear that there was an understanding. There's a lot of extra biblical material and evidence that points towards the idea of a washing.

That people would have known this whole idea of water being used symbolically in washing. But they would have been used to it only in terms of the outsider.

It was the outsiders who were to be washed. Those who were to become proselytes of the Jewish faith would need to be washed.

It wasn't called baptism, it was just called washing. They would need to know circumcision and they would need to engage in sacrifice. So there was several rituals that they would be involved in to bring them as outsiders into the faith of Judaism and that was known.

[6 : 06] I know what Jesus sometimes thought of that, don't we, when he spoke to the Pharisees and said, you go over land and sea to make a convert, a proselyte, and you make them twice as much a son of hell as you are.

So we recognise and know the concept was there, that the Pharisees were engaged in religious proselytisation, they were bringing people into the Jewish faith and that washing was part of that.

It was for outsiders. But then we see John and I'm going to call him John the baptiser. John the baptiser comes into the scene.

I think there's a song by Johnny Cash called John the baptiser. No, it's not. It's by John Cougar Melloncamp. John the baptiser, he comes on the scene and this is a radical change and this is a different thing that's happening here.

John is coming and they know who he is. They recognise him as an Old Testament, the last over. They didn't recognise him as the last of the Old Testament prophets but as a prophet.

[7 : 13] They recognise him as the one who is the forerunner of the Messiah and he comes with a message of repentance and faith baptism.

So there's a development and there's a progression in what John is doing to what they're used to. And you know the interesting thing about this is that he is proclaiming that this washing for the outsider is something that they need as well.

He's proclaiming to the Jews of the day, the Judaistic believers that this washing is something that they need and we'll see that that's significant.

He's the prophesied prophet, isn't he? We read that as Matthew recounts who Jesus is. This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepared the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

He was often people in the Old Testament who had the job of preparing the way for the King, making the highway a highway that was fit for a King to travel on.

[8 : 25] And that is the picture and that's the message that's been brought here, that the last of the great prophets was going to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

One of the last words from God in the Old Testament is in Malachi 400 years previously where the day of the Lord is prophesied, Malachi 4 and verse 5 where we see it's actually the last words, isn't it?

Interesting, the last words of the Old Testament. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. He speaks there of the Elijah that was to come and John is the outworking, the fulfillment of that prophecy.

They often spoke, this is the Elijah who's to come, is John the baptiser in his dress, in his message, in his location coming up from the desert.

[9 : 30] There were so many parallels between himself and Elijah preparing the way for the Messiah. It's not interesting how often God speaks out of the desert in the Bible, how much it's used symbolically of God's people in the desert, where they meet with God, where God speaks to them, where God refreshes and renews them, where God brings them to a sense of himself.

We always want to be in the palace. We want to find clothes, but sometimes God deals with us and speaks to us in the desert places of our lives, in the desert experiences where we don't often necessarily find Him or think that we will find Him.

But often there He's sharpest, He's closest, the things that distract us are stripped away, aren't they?

And we see and hear Him in our lives. But John the baptiser, he comes and there's big crowds come to John, you know, people from all over the region came to hear what John had to say.

The gossiping classes, the chattering classes spoke about the coming king and the Messiah and who this was. There was a tremendous sense of expectation as people came and responded to his message of repentance, confessing their sins and being baptized, being washed in the Jordan River.

[11 : 10] So he comes with this message, doesn't he, repent and for the kingdom of heaven is near.

Repent. And that same message is the message that Jesus begun His ministry with, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. Now it's unfortunate that very often we have simply negative connotations of that word repent.

Somehow we've stripped of its fullness and its broadness and its beauty and it's purely a negative term for His own repent. In sarcophonaches rip off the finality and bemoan who you are and there is a great element of recognizing our sinfulness before the king of kings.

In this call as the king comes, there's confession of sin clearly that is what was central to the washing of John and the Jordan in his baptismal work.

But he also says not only to repent but also to show the fruit of repentance. Doesn't he speak about that? He says to the Pharisees and the Sadducees who are coming along the religious leaders and the political leaders of the day, something's happening here.

[12 : 29] We want to be involved. We want to be involved in this and part of it. And so they come along to this great movement that's happening. But John knows their hearts. There's not a change in their hearts.

And he prophetically says who told you to flee from the wrath to come? Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come as he exposes their hearts?

There wasn't the fruit in keeping with repentance. So there's this positive but negative, sorry, there's negative but positive side to it as well. There's a confessing of sin but then there's a dedicating of life and a giving of life to God in a positive way, the fruit of repentance.

It's about turning round. John was basically saying turn round. Face God. Know His glory in your life.

Know obedience because of what He's done. Love Him, serve Him. Trust in this coming redeemer who will take away your sins and entrust your life to Him.

[13 : 31] He says to these great leaders of the day, your background is not going to save you. Your religion is not going to save you. The fact that you're genetically linked to Abrams is not going to save you, he says.

He says you're outsiders. You think washing is just for the Gentiles who want to become sons of hell? No. He says you're outsiders and you need this washing and your religion and your genetic ethics and your contacts and your rituals will not save you, he says.

And in most powerful terms he says, look if God wants to raise up children with Abraham, he could just bring them from these stones. It's mighty power and glory.

He says please don't limit and shrink God into that way of thinking. So he reminds them of their need for a washing.

He reminds them that their sin makes them outsiders despite the privileges they have, despite the background and the religion and the ritual that they know they need this washing.

[14 : 43] And then we come to Jesus, the baptized. John the baptiser is to baptize Jesus, the Son of God.

Why? Jesus baptized. There's no confession needed, no repentance needed, no sin to be washed away.

What is happening here? He doesn't need to enter the kingdom of God, he's the Son of God. This is the King of kings. Why is Jesus being baptized here?

Is it a textual errant? Is it a mistake? Is it an element of theological confusion?

Jesus is baptized. Why is he baptized? I think the element that we just spoke of, the positive nature of baptism is very significant here.

[15 : 46] It's not just repentance, it's a recognition of the fruit of repentance and the spirit at work in our lives so that we turn towards God.

And Jesus is here engaging in an act of obedience to, as he says himself, fulfill all righteousness.

Let it be so now, he says. The time is right, he says. It's proper for us to do this, to fulfill all righteousness. He's that acknowledgement that baptism is also positively committing and consecrating totally our lives to God in obedience and holiness.

That's what it symbolizes. And Jesus is saying here, I'm fulfilling that. I will, I have, I am and I will fulfill all righteousness.

My life will be one of total consecration and holiness towards God. There will be no sin, no half-heartedness, no failure.

[16 : 58] My life is His. And His baptism is at one level a recognition of that, that He is committing to fulfilling that righteousness because we can't.

However hard we try, we can't do that. And He is here as our Messiah. He's here as our Redeemer. He's here as our Savior because He is doing what we can't do.

Please don't think that we can do it on our own. But as well as in active obedience, it's also Christ assuming, surely is it not, His role as our Savior.

He's publicly taking on the mantle of our Redeemer. The great words of Isaiah 53 which maybe 38 years ago I learned from beginning to end downstairs in the hall in Sunday school.

You know who has believed our report? To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender root, the root out of a dry ground.

[18 : 24] He was despised and rejected by men a man of sorrows. Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.

Is this not the beginning of that? In a public way, in a declarative way that He's taking on Himself our sorrows and our iniquities and our sin.

It's the public mantle whereby He is taking that on board. He's associating Himself with us in our humanity, in our need for cleansing.

And He will be the one who will be the means of our cleansing. These are substitutes, Sanctions 5, 21. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might become what?

What do we become? The righteousness of God. He says I fulfill the righteousness here. So I'm going to fulfill the righteousness and we receive that from Him as a gift.

[19 : 25] It's a gift. And He takes on board all our sin. This is the start of that. Is there anything more glorious in the whole of the universe than someone who is committed and dedicated at this point in his public ministry to taking on board our sin?

He fulfills that in Himself. He is saying in this baptism, I will be for you the outsider. That's what He's saying.

I'm going to be the outsider. I'm going to be on the cross. I'm going to be for sake of the Father. That's what I'm going to go for, for you.

That is the message of the gospel. Christ, the great Son of God, becomes the outsider. And that is what He's teaching us here.

Not only is it an act of obedience and an assuming of His role and I'm doing very well here and getting all my A's together, it's an assurance of heaven.

[20 : 37] Jesus Christ is God's Son. He's infinite, eternal. He's divine, this divine nature, but He also remember of the human nature, took on board flesh.

That's what the season's all about, isn't it? As we remember it, He's becoming flesh, born in a womb. Knowing helplessness, hunger, growing, and all.

I'm not going to go into that because that's next week's theme. But He takes a human nature and here in His public ministry as it begins, 30 years of age, He's learning, He's growing, and He's needing assurance.

Eternal Son of God, human nature, needing assurance. And we have this unbelievable assurance from the unique and mysterious Trinity revealing itself in this great moment where the Holy Spirit descend like a dove of our God.

The Father says, this is my Son, whom I love with Him, I'm well pleased. What assurance for Jesus in that moment who needed assurance?

[21 : 55] And not only for Him, but for all of us, as we think about what is the nature of salvation, what's the nature of the gospel, what's the nature of what Jesus has done for us, what is God like?

Well, here we have God the Father, this is my Son, whom I love with Him. I'm well pleased with what He's doing and I'm well pleased with what lies ahead.

I'm well pleased, we've agreed that this is going to be the way. We've agreed that this is the only hope for humanity. He's well pleased and the Spirit descends on empowering Him for His public ministry.

He comes emptying Himself of self-possession and of self-strength and depends on His Holy Spirit, enabling Him to do the work.

And the Holy Spirit comes like a dove, a lot of people speak about what that means symbolically. Well, we know about the dove and the story of Noah's Ark, redemptive links to God saving His people.

[23 : 05] We know of Jonah, who is redeemed and is the great sign of the resurrection. Jonah coming out of the whale of the big fish after three days, Jonah's name means dove.

And of course we have in song of Solomon, all over the place, meaning innocence, love, beauty and relationship. Maybe we take these things together, it just symbolizes the astonishing love that is poured out onto the sun as He outworks this great task on our behalf.

It's a recollection for us of the Trinitarian commitment to Jesus being the Savior, the pleasure of God defy their Son and Holy Spirit in our redemption.

Damn those who say that this is cosmic child abuse, lest they themselves repent. Here we see the commitment and the strength and the willingness and the involvement of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this outstanding task.

And that brings us to the baptism for today. We've seen John the baptiser and Jesus the baptised. Well, David's been baptised today as well.

[24 : 33] And it's an ongoing and a developing theme of Scripture, isn't it? Because baptism isn't the end. But we do have at the end of his earthly ministry, the Great Commission, go into all the world and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

So we have that tremendous developing teaching and theme of baptism in the New Testament. And baptism becoming through Jesus command the great public declaration of discipleship for all believers.

This great sacrament is left as David comes for baptism. It's an acknowledgement he's no longer an outsider, not in the church, not in membership.

I'm speaking about in relationship with God. And as it symbolises the sacrificial atoning death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf so that we can be brought into the family, so that we can be adopted, so that we can belong, so that we know that we are no longer an outsider.

And there's something I haven't touched on at all. There's a future element in this whole passage which kind of merges Jesus first coming with the second and fleeing the wrath to come and the reality of a final day of judgment.

[26 : 00] And on that day you want to be on Jesus' side, you want to be on the inside in the family covered by his righteousness, covered by his great atoning work as you trust in him.

So baptism for us today is about a life turned around. That's what it is. A life turned around. It's a recognition of a need. It's a need for God, cleansing, new life, the Holy Spirit, confession of sins, sacrifice and significance of Jesus on the cross, the empowerment of the Spirit in our lives.

All of these things, greater or lesser degrees, symbolised in the washing and the baptism of believers. A life turned around.

And the challenge is for us as Christians, our life's turned around. The challenge is it? Is it something ongoing? It's not just a once for all event.

And what it symbolises, it symbolises a lifestyle. It symbolises a way of living. A way of living that's constantly being turned around, constantly facing the living God, constantly confessing, constantly bearing the fruit of repentance.

[27 : 20] That's the life that he wants for us in trust and in dependence on him. Not in our own strength. I don't want to go home and turn around.

I need to try harder and turn around. I need to make more effort to turn around. But it's saying, I can't do these things. I need you, I need your Spirit and I need your grace to turn me around in my life.

And it's a baptism in the name of the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit, beautifully expressed and signified and seen in this baptism of Jesus, all three gloriously involved.

And we baptised because God has chosen, because Christ has redeemed and because the Holy Spirit brings life and cleansing.

You will never choose on your own. Need the Trinity to be involved in our life in the very outset.

[28 : 28] And in being baptised in that Trinitarian name, we've been baptised into that beloved family, aren't we? It's about belonging. It's about receiving adoption from Jesus where he didn't need that adoption.

He was, this is my beloved Son whom I'm well pleased. But God says to us in Christ, you are my beloved children and whom I love, whom I'm well pleased because of Jesus.

What Jesus has done, that is astonishing reality. We belong to a people of God. We've entered into a covenant with God, covenant that we believe extends in promise and in reality is a sign for our children also.

And we know His cleansing and His life. So as we head into baptism, there is no longer any silence.

So don't think that, oh I feel like, what the Jews felt like in that inter-testamental period, that 400 years of silence, God's silent to me.

[29 : 44] However that may feel in your experience, there's never any silence like that again. The love and commitment of God is declared, is delivered and is offered through what Jesus has done.

Calvary shouts louder than anything that shouts in the whole universe and remains a loud exposition of the love of God and of the commitment of God and of the wholehearted desire of God to usher in His kingdom and to make us citizens of His kingdom.

Are we listening to the voice of God and responding to the voice of God and trusting in the voice of God?

Is there any expectation among us? Do we genuinely believe in the voice of God today?

Or is He silent because we've stopped listening for this great message that He speaks in grace and continues to speak in grace to us?

[31 : 04] Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer. Father God, help us to know You and understand You and love You better.

Help us today in the visible symbol of baptism to sense and to know the spiritual reality of cleansing.

Bless David as he comes forward for baptism and bless us as we rejoice in him and with him. And help us to glorify You through what we do and through what is involved in this ceremony.

In this sacrament for we ask in Jesus' name, Amen. And we're going to sing together and we're going to sing in an accompanied psalm.