

The Baptism of Jesus – Pleasing the Father

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Scripture Text:

Isaiah 42:1-9 New International Version (NIV)

The Servant of the LORD

42 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
4 he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”
5 This is what God the Lord says—
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,
who gives breath to its people,
and life to those who walk on it:
6 “I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,
7 to open eyes that are blind,
to free captives from prison
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.
8 “I am the Lord; that is my name!
I will not yield my glory to another
or my praise to idols.
9 See, the former things have taken place,
and new things I declare;
before they spring into being
I announce them to you.”

Matthew 3:13-17 New International Version (NIV)

The Baptism of Jesus

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”



15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."



Sermon Text:

This Sunday is the day we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. In his day, baptisms were done for the purpose of repentance. In Luke 16:16 Jesus says “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone is forcing their way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.” This is why John came to prepare the people – Law breakers - with a baptism of repentance. Yet Jesus was without sin, so why did he undergo baptism? I think Scripture points to 2 main reasons. Before we dive into them, please join me in prayer. (Pray)

I believe Scripture leads us to 2 reasons for Jesus to undergo baptism. 1. To reveal or identify himself as the long-awaited Messiah. And 2. To show his solidarity with us – mere sinners, yet children of God. We just finished celebrating Christmas – the season when we refer to Jesus as Emmanuel, or God with us. God, the All Mighty, came to dwell among us. This is an act of ultimate solidarity, underscored in his baptism.

How does his baptism identify Jesus as Messiah? Let’s return to the reading from the prophet Isaiah read this morning.

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.

I will put my Spirit on him. Those who were familiar with words of the great prophet Isaiah, which would be any practicing Jew, would recognize that the Holy Spirit would identify the Messiah and in today’s Gospel Matthew 3:16 reads, “ as soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” John the Baptist would indeed know the Prophet Isaiah and when he saw the Holy Spirit descending and alighting on Jesus he would know this was the Messiah. But in case that wasn’t enough (I



love it when Gog goes that extra mile to be clear – I can be oblivious sometimes) in case that wasn't enough, God spoke. "This is my son". Jesus was identified at his baptism as the coming Messiah, and as God's son.

The same chapter of Isaiah also tells us what to expect from this Messiah. He will bring justice to the nations.

2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.

3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

4 he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.

In his teaching the islands will put their hope."

So, John and all who knew the teaching of Isaiah would know what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. "In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; not through war or with a lot of yelling. Isaiah instructed the Jews to put their hope in him.

As we continue with this passage, Isaiah tells Jesus who he is to be and speaking to the one on whom the Holy Spirit descends, God says,

6 "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;

I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you

to be a covenant for the people

and a light for the Gentiles,

7 to open eyes that are blind,

to free captives from prison

and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

...A covenant for the people, and a light for the Gentiles. Now Gentiles are non-Jews. We're Gentiles. They might not have been familiar with the words of the prophet, so God



spoke at Jesus' baptism too. So, through Isaiah, God makes sure the Jews know who is giving this prophecy.

8 "I am the Lord; that is my name!
I will not yield my glory to another
or my praise to idols.

9 See, the former things have taken place,
and new things I declare;
before they spring into being
I announce them to you."

At Jesus' baptism, God spoke from heaven, saying "This is my son whom I love; With him I am well pleased." This is saying even more than Isaiah predicted. Isaiah said this would be the Messiah; now God declares this Messiah to be the Son of God himself! Those present at the river that day who saw the Holy Spirit descend and heard the Voice of God, would know that Jesus was the Messiah & the Son of God in the flesh! 1 reason for Jesus to undergo this baptism of repentance is to reveal himself as Messiah.

A second reason for Jesus to undergo baptism is to show his solidarity with humankind. The LORD God the Father spoke at Jesus' baptism. Ps. 29 has a few things to say about the voice of God. The voice of the Lord ...

Thunders over the waters, is powerful, majestic, breaks the cedars of Lebanon, strikes with flashes of lightening, shakes the desert of Kadesh, twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. Let's face it, God is not always soft-spoken. The psalmist David says when God speaks, you know it! "All in his temple cry "Glory"!"! Just from hearing the voice of God, we would sense his glory, majesty, power & strength! Yet here's Jesus – revealed as a human, undergoing by choice, the sinner's baptism. He is not here to force the kingdom of God but to lead us personally into this kingdom by showing us how to live and by dying the death we sinners deserve. He chose to be associated with us. Wow.

This baptism is an interesting trinitarian moment when all 3 persons of God are present and participating. 3 separate persons all here to reveal Jesus as the Christ. The Holy Spirit descended from the Father to the Son, the Father spoke over the Son, and the Son was



pleasing the Father by taking on this human position in the water. Jesus is God, revealed by his Father and by the Holy Spirit, yet living a human life not to TELL us the way to salvation, but to SHOW us, to walk in the way of salvation and open the door for us to salvation. It starts with repentance. For Jesus and for us.

God set aside his majesty, power, glory to live the life of one of us. He identified himself to us, then identified himself with us – as one of us. Remember that Joan Osborne song “One of us?” The chorus goes “What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us? Just a stranger on a bus...trying to make his way home?” Yes, Jesus was God, yet he chose to set all that aside to be one of us. This pleased God the Father.

With whom do we identify? With whom do you identify? Back a long time ago when I was being raised, there was an expression “Keeping up with the Joneses”. I’m not sure of the origin of that saying, but it meant that it was important to appear as if we were just as well off or as affluent as the neighbor, no matter what the reality- we kept up appearances.

I’m just the second generation from Irish immigrants. My grandparents immigrated to the Philly area from Ireland in the 1920s as young adults looking for opportunity. They could not hide their Irish roots due to their strong Irish brogue, and although they were much better off here than back in the home country, they were limited in what they could – what they would be allowed to achieve. I’m proud of my grandfather, who with no more than a 2nd grade education, worked his way up to a foreman with the Philadelphia Electric Company. MY grandmother found work outside the home as a maid and nanny to a rich family- the Merkles. Nini and Ricki, the kids in her care, kept up with Nana until her death with cards, letters and photos. But my mother, losing the accent, wanted to rise in economic status & her Irish parents wanted that for her as well – to keep up with the Joneses. Although she had polio as a child, then contracted tuberculosis as a young adult, she overcame, got training as a blood tech and married a College graduate. (although she was Irish Protestant and my dad was Irish Catholic, so that was quite the scandal – another story for another day!)

I credit my parents a great deal for the values they instilled in me. Although growing up in the environment where appearances were important and where or when blacks were still



forbidden to purchase homes in many of the suburban neighborhoods across America, they still did not allow us to look down on anybody. I guess even though they rose above their meager beginnings, they never forgot them. Later, in the recession of the 1970's they fell pretty far, never to fully recover – so my roots are also a mix of trying to keep up appearances while struggling to pay the bills. I went to racially mixed schools and was allowed to date whomever I wanted. I credit my parents for instilling the value to work hard for everything and yet never to look down on anybody.

Yet we do.

We all do. Maybe it's different, but let's face it – it's hard not to say ...”I worked my way up, why can't everybody?” Well, opportunity comes to mind as an answer. My parents were white and if they could just lose the Irish accent, they could shake their Irish roots and the prejudice that went with them. Can a black or brown person do that? A Latino? We shouldn't have to shake our culture or heritage to be considered good enough. We're all children of God, equally loved and of equal value. Jesus came to show us that.

Jesus came not only to preach good news to the poor, but to BE good news for the poor. Are we? We do a lot in this congregation in ministry to those less fortunate. This pleases God. Just listen to God speaking over us, “These are my kids, with whom I am well pleased”.

One of my favorite modern day theologians is Anthony Gittins, a Roman Catholic priest who wrote in his book “Ministry at the Margins” about doing ministry WITH the poor, as opposed to ministry TO or FOR them. Both are necessary, but we risk more of ourselves in ministry WITH the poor. If we strive for truly risk-taking mission work, consider what is at risk in ministry to and for the poor except maybe our wealth. But in ministry WITH the poor, we risk our very identity. We are willing to yield the decision-making power to those whom the ministry benefits. We yield position and power and influence. We risk who we want to be. Can we really yield decision-making power to those who benefit rather than sticking the power where the money is? Hands-on ministry and living among those who may have less fortune is critical to our salvation. We need to be in ministry at the margins to really see who we are. Can we identify ourselves with those unlike ourselves?



Who are those marginalized in our society today with whom we should be identifying ourselves? Who should we really be experiencing life with to understand how things really are ...for everybody? Will we give the marginalized a voice? A vote? Power? Jesus associating with the lowly law-breakers – the marginalized in Jewish society - is what pleased the Father.

I attended seminary at EBTS, now called Palmer theological Seminary of Eastern University (as did Pastor Jackie). At this seminary was a professor Ron Sider who founded “Evangelicals for Social Action” or ESA. At the time there was a Sider Center, which I believe evolved into ESA. This is a think tank which seeks to develop biblical solutions to social and economic problems through incubating programs that operate at the intersection of faith and social justice. He himself chose to live at the poverty level. I’m not familiar enough to know if he forced his whole family to do so as well, but I know he redirected his seminary salary so that he could be in solidarity with those with whom he ministered. This is extreme, yet this REALLY pleases the Father.

NFL football players- many do much to give back, not forgetting their roots or the communities from which their fans come. JJ Watt, after hurricane Harvey devastated Houston in 2017, this Houston Texan’s defensive end launched a relief fund that raised over \$30MM. This is ministry to the poor. He also distributed food and supplies to the residents in recovery from Harvey. He won the Walter Payton MOTY award. Hands-on ministry with those impacted. This may not be the solidarity level of Ron Sider or of Jesus Christ, but it is pleasing to the Father.

The first reason Jesus, sinless, participated in the baptism of repentance is to be identified as Messiah. The second reason is to show his solidarity with us – sinners. This pleases the Father. We are the Gentiles to whom Jesus was identified and with whom Jesus identified. How will we respond? How will we please our heavenly Father? As we ponder resolutions for 2020, let’s look for ways to be in true solidarity with those marginalized today. Let’s seek to please our Heavenly Father. I don’t know about you, but when my time here is done, I want to hear those words of the Father saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant”. In Luke 13 Jesus told us to repent & bear fruit or perish. Jesus showed us how. Repent and follow in his way. Amen.

