

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

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Scripture: Mark 1:1-13

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The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'"

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. And he was preaching and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately coming out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness for ty days being tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

This is an interesting passage of scripture because we actually need to look at the other gospel accounts to get a full idea of what really transpired here. In the beginning it's about John the Baptist and how he is fulfilling his ministry as the forerunner, the messenger who comes before the Anointed One, the Messiah. He's in the country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem are coming out to him and being baptized. A baptism of repentance as his sermons were – "Repent and be baptized," was what he said. But he also said, "After me is coming One who is mightier than I, and I'm not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandal. I baptize you with water but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." In Mark's gospel it says: Jesus came and was baptized by John in the Jordan and then immediately as He came up out of the water, the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and a voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."

But if we look at Matthew's gospel, we see a little bit of the kind of encounter that John and Jesus had. John is doing his thing and talking about Jesus. Matthew 3:11 tells us: "I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I," and all of that. Then when Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan to be baptized by him, John tried to prevent Him saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" And Jesus answers and says to him, "Permit it at this time, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.

I was thinking about this encounter – what a 'stressful' time it must have been for John as he saw Jesus coming to him. Here he was baptizing all these people who are coming as sinners, and knowing that Jesus waling to him was sinless; He didn't have to repent of anything. And so, he says, "I am the

one who needs to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" And Jesus says, "Permit it at this time for it has something to do with fulfilling all righteousness."

I want you to listen to that in different translations:

CEV – Jesus answered, "For now this is how it should be, because we must do all God wants us to do." Then John agreed.

The Living Bible – But Jesus said, "Please do it for I must do all that is right." So then, John baptized Him.

The New Living Translation – But Jesus said, "It should be done for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize Him.

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

"Allow it at this time." Somehow Jesus needed to be baptized by John to fulfill God's plan and purposes. Even though He didn't need the baptism, He submitted Himself to the baptism. As we can see, it had to do with God. It had to do with doing what was right. Whether it was needed or not from this perspective or our understanding of what we are reading in scripture, God saw it fit that Jesus should be baptized. So Jesus allowed Himself to be baptized by John so that it would fulfill all righteousness.

I want us to think about that line that Jesus said, "Let it be done so that it can fulfill all righteousness," or everything that is right in terms of a Godly understanding. What is right in terms of God's will brings out righteousness, and Jesus was saying that this baptism, however you or I may not understand it, needs to be done to allow all of God's righteousness to be fulfilled. And so it happened.

This took me back to the song 'Mary Did You Know?' it's Mary thinking aloud and being asked these questions: Did you know that this Son of yours has been where angels have trod? Did you know that when you kissed His face you kissed the face of God?

I have often wondered, beyond Mary, of John and Jesus' relationship. What John gleaned from his mother and what Jesus got from Mary and Joseph, and whether they connected? I wonder as John grew up whether he talked about Jesus to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth said, "Yes! When Mary first came, I felt you jump in my womb and I recognized that He was the Lord." I wonder how that must have sounded to John, whether they grew up together? Did they compare notes as they were growing up and saying - "Okay. This was the prophecy on me.

Then one day, John must have gone off as he began to fulfill that call on His life. and soon after that, Jesus began His earthly ministry. Then the two of them come together, and this moment John looking at Jesus and saying, "No! This is wrong. You need to baptize me, not the other way around." And Jesus said, "No, God's will is for me to be baptized by you. So do it." And he did.

Here's what I'd like for us to think about in this passage. There are many things that we can focus on. But I want us to look at the attitude that Jesus had. His attitude was one of total compliance to the will of God. Whether or not, it meant putting Himself in a position where it seemed like this was not right, almost submitting to a lesser person. He knew that His ministry was the Messianic ministry,

and John the Baptist was the forerunner, and yet, He knew that the will of His Father was to submit to it. And so He did.

SPIRITUAL PRIDE?

This made me think how Jesus was bereft of any kind of spiritual pride – knowing who He was, still He allowed Himself to be baptized like all the other people who were sinners coming for repentance, He too came on that level because the Father wanted it. Bereft of spiritual pride! Sometimes it's so easy for us to get caught up in spiritual pride – to look at where we are on this continuum of our journey as we make it towards the time when we will be with the Lord. But as we look at whether we've got a good knowledge of the bible, whether we pray with people, whether we can expound the scriptures or whether we memorize and know much scripture – all of these things can contribute to a sense of pride.

Jonathan Edwards said, "The first and worst cause of error that prevails in our day is spiritual pride. This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of Christ. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit to darken the mind and mislead the judgment and the main handle by which Satan takes hold of Christians to hinder a work of God." And Jesus wouldn't let that happen. It was necessary and it got done. The work of God through Him for humanity would go undeterred because He was completely available to do all that the Father wanted.

Spiritual pride is really an interesting place for us as Christians because it is so subtle. I was reading an article by Stephen Cole and he says, "Years ago, Dr. H. A. Ironside who was pastor of the prestigious Moody church in downtown Chicago, felt that he was not as humble as he should have been. So he asked an older friend what he could do about it. The friend suggested: Make a sandwich board with a plan of salvation and scripture on it. Put it on and walk through the business district of Chicago for a whole day. Ironside followed his friend's humiliating advice. After he got home, as he took off the sandwich board, he caught himself thinking – there's not another person in Chicago that would be willing to do a thing like that." How subtle! Pride. Even in the doing of something to diminish pride, pride can creep in.

We look at our own lives and ask ourselves the question: Do we have spiritual pride? Is there pride that we are harboring? Because it stands in the way of God's intent and purposes for us. God always works in us and through us – the work that we can do for the community or whatever it is that God has a plan for us to do. We just need to ask ourselves the question: Where do I stand in terms of spiritual pride? Do I need to stop and say, "Holy Spirit, would you shine the torch light on my life and see if there are any areas of pride that I've just allowed in, that are stopping Your will and purposes from being done?"

OVER-FAMILIARITY?

The other thing that I wanted us to think about was this. You've heard the old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." I was thinking of John and Jesus, and how they ought to have known each other. Yet, here was John, older than Jesus. And yet, when the moment came to align with God's purposes, none of that was visible. He did what he needed to do, and Jesus did what Jesus needed to do. Their relationship and their knowledge of each other didn't dilute their attitude toward each other's mission. John understood who he was and Jesus understood who He was.

I want to ask you this question as I just thought about this whole idea. With my relationship with God, as I understand Him and as I grow closer and closer to Him, am I making sure that my closeness

with Him in no way diminishes my reverence for Him? And through my reverence for Him, the plans that He has for me, that I enjoy this closeness that Jesus said, "You're no longer slaves, but you're my brothers and sisters." We are the family of God. Can it be that just getting into and understanding ourselves as sons and daughters of God, that we have stopped at that place because we just think: Oh, my goodness, this is wonderful! I'm going to exult in this place that I am in, forgetting that as sons and daughters of God, we still have a role to play. That's not the place where we park, but that's the place that gives us the foundation to be who we ought to be in this world.

So, to make sure that familiarity with God doesn't breed contempt in the sense that just exalting in this beautiful relationship that God has given to us as a gift to call Him 'Abba, Father,' we don't forget that we have an express purpose why we have been placed on this earth. We remember that God has a plan and a purpose for us and that, whatever or however close we get to Him, it must not distance ourselves from the plan but draw us closer into His plan so that we are able to hear even better and clearer what He wants from us.

So, as we look at this dynamic between John the Baptist and Jesus early on in the ministry, the way they handled this meeting on the Jordan where John said, "I'm not the one who shall baptize You; You should baptize me." And Jesus, in perfect alignment with the Father says, "No, let this happen."

I wonder, beloved, as we look at our own lives and see what plans God has for us; whether by any chance the spiritual pride that we have in who we are, what we've achieved, what we know, how people view us, is keeping us from doing what God wants us to do, even if it is to do something which is "beneath the status we have as children of God and known in the world and to people around us?" We need to make sure that that never happens, that always as Jesus Himself showed. There was a point where He could even take a towel and water and wash the disciples' feet. There was nothing too low for Him to do.

A good place for us as we start this year is to be thinking about whether we are fulfilling the plans and purposes of God, and then ask the question: Is my familiarity with God, this closeness that I'm growing into, is it actually thwarting God's purposes? By any chance, is there spiritual pride in who I am as a Christian, also coming in the way of fulfilling God's plans?

As we look to the Lord in prayer, I want to ask you to invite the Spirit of God to have free reign in your heart and mind and say – Lord, probe, see Lord. I think I'm on the pathway that I need to be in, and I'm walking on that pathway. But Lord, You take stock. You show me whether there's anything inside me that is in some way thwarting Your will and purposes.

Heavenly Father, search our hearts; shine the spotlight on our lives and show us, if by any chance, our growth as Your children, as disciples, has led to a familiarity that prevents Your purposes from being fulfilled. Or that there is a harboring of spiritual pride even that prevents us from doing the things that You want us to do.

Help us Master, to see it and Lord, in seeing it, we ask that You would forgive us for any places that we are in that need confession and forgiveness. If we've harbored pride, forgive us. If we've taken the closeness and proximity that we have with You and allowed it to prevent us from knowing Your will, forgive us as well. But Lord, we want to follow hard after You this year, and the years ahead. So Lord, take charge. Fill our hearts with Your Holy Spirit, that under fresh anointing and power, we may follow in Your footsteps doing Your will and purposes. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.