

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?"*

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

*As soon as Jesus was baptised, 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 lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "this is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

John the Baptist was called to preach a baptism of water for repentance. People from Jerusalem and the region, many people, came down to the river to confess their sins and be baptised. John is the one the prophet Isaiah foretold of, quoted a few verses earlier in Matthew, when he said *"a voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him"*. John said *"I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*

John was told by the Lord that he would recognise the anticipated Son of God, as *"the man on whom you see the spirit come down on and remain"* (John 1:33-34). And while John was working in anticipation of the coming of Jesus, he would have been at least a little surprised to have Jesus rock up to his patch at the river Jordan. In John 1, when John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him he says *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* I can imagine the excitement with which John might have exclaimed.

If John was excited than, the reason for Jesus visit would make his jaw drop so hard it would break ground. Jesus has come to be baptised...by John. John's response *"I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?"* beautifully combines both objection, John's attempts to deter Jesus from this course of action, and bewilderment. John, initially at least, doesn't want to go ahead.

One reason for John's apprehension is revealed in his response; *I need to be baptised by you*. This statement demonstrates John's humility in the presence of Jesus. John acknowledges that he is a sinner, and if Jesus is the one who has come to save, the one who will perform a baptism with the Holy Spirit, John is simply acknowledging the imperative that he **needs** redemption; otherwise there is no hope for him. Jesus is the doctor, Jesus is the one who has come to save and John, like all of us are the ill patients in **need** of saving. When John says *"and do you come to me"* there is the suggestion of his utter inadequacy to baptise Jesus, John said he isn't even fit to carry his sandals.

It is a difficult thing for John to process what's happening here. The Son of God has shown up. He has holiness and righteousness in his DNA - It is integral to the nature of God, and as we know, Jesus will live a life without sin. He is the holy and blameless perfect Lamb of God. In fact, holiness is at the core of John's difficulties.

Remember that for years and years God has been trying to reconcile his people, the Israelites, to himself. But they are a sinful people and he is a Holy Righteous God. If God's holiness and righteousness could be likened to a roaring fire, and the people of Israel, indeed us as well, to say a cube of ice, and the ice cube were to be placed in the presence of the fire, it would melt, steam,

evaporate, vanish. It would be utterly destroyed. The fire would continue roaring, unchanged. The fire and the ice cube are incompatible, and attempts to combine the two simply result in the destruction of the ice. This is how incompatible sin is with God's holiness. The two cannot be simply combined; the fire will not be diminished.

So God created ways for his holy presence to dwell amongst his people, like the Tabernacle, where God would descend on the tent of meeting, a cloud would cover it, and above the Ark of the Covenant he would meet his people. There needed to be consecrated priests, who had to do things to prepare to meet the holy god in the tent of meeting. They couldn't just run in there on a whim.

Given this historical understanding of the holy nature of God, John's understanding of what baptism is for (baptism is for sinners), and John's own sense of being an inadequate baptiser to baptise the Messiah, you can understand John's initial objection. How can John baptise the Son of the Holy God. This baptism just seems to utterly contravene the proper order of things. It just doesn't seem right to John.

We might remember another occasion when Jesus did something that seemed to a particular disciple to be against the right order of things. When Jesus came to wash the disciples' feet, remember Peter's objection: (John 13) *"No, you shall never wash my feet"* said Peter. Jesus' response is unequivocal: *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."* *"Then Lord"* Peter replies *"not just my feet but my hands and head as well!"*

Here, Jesus says to John the Baptist: *"Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."* Another translation I read uses *necessary* instead of *proper* – *it is necessary to fulfil all righteousness. At this John consented*, and the baptism will take place.

What did Jesus mean when he said it is proper to **fulfil** all righteousness – fulfil. Why is Jesus going to submit to baptism? We can find some answers by looking at what the prophet Isaiah, prophesied:

*(Not sure what translation) Isaiah 53:11 "by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities"*

Okay, this verse describes Jesus, who is righteous. And the righteous servant shall **bear** the iniquities, sins, of others. Well we're probably pretty comfortable/familiar with that concept, but the verses that really clarify why Jesus would submit to baptism are as follows

*Isaiah 53:12: "because he poured out his life unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors"*

And late in Luke, Jesus quotes this verse again:

*Luke 22:37: "And he was numbered with the transgressors, and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me".*

Through this baptism, Jesus will begin a process integral to the success of his mission of salvation. He will exchange his righteousness, for taking on the sins of others, that he might, on the cross bear the

full wrath of God as punishment for the sins of the world. Jesus is **fulfilling** what Isaiah prophesied. There is also the sense of Jesus solidarity with the sinners he has come to save, through this baptism. He's right down there with them, as he will be again and again. Jesus is God, but now he also powerfully expresses his human-ness

We know the whole Jesus story, how it will end in his death and resurrection. That is what sets the context for this baptism to ultimately make sense. Though there was the prophecy of Isaiah, at the time of this baptism the full implementation of plan for sinner's salvation is only known to Jesus and his heavenly father. Many things Jesus will do, as he fulfils what has been prophesied, are going to seem as this did to John the Baptist, **at least** a little bit odd.

### **Phil 2 he did not count**

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature <sup>[a]</sup> God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature <sup>[b]</sup> of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Matthew doesn't describe the baptism itself, but as soon as it was complete Matthew says Jesus rose up out of the water. Then something really amazing happens.

*Verse 16: At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove lighting on him.*

What an incredible image! Imagine if after a baptism here, the roof of the church was lifted off and we could see heaven being opened. We would just go 'woah' - it would be an awe inspiring experience. We should hold on to that sense of awe, because know this is a verse we may have heard or read many times, and we can become a blaze about it.

Heaven is opened, and it suggests that the barrier between earth and heaven is removed for a time. Earth and heaven seem closer. And out of heaven comes the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending onto Jesus. Interestingly, the bible commentary I was reading said that at the time of writing dove may have been any kind of a number of doves or pigeons, though in our time the image of a pigeon and landing on Jesus doesn't have quite the same affect. The dove is generally accepted though, and so the spirit of god in the form of a dove is emblematic of power in gentleness. And was it literally a dove that came down? The verse describes the spirit of god descending **like a dove**.

There is also possible ambiguity in Matthew about who is really witnessing this event; the verse is:

*...and **he** saw the spirit of god descending like a dove lighting on him.*

Who is the he? It's thought to be Jesus but some manuscripts seem to place emphasis on Jesus being the only one to see the holy spirit descending, while others suggest this is an event others were able to see it as well. In John's gospel, John the Baptist testifies to seeing the Spirit of God descending on Jesus, which was how he was to recognise Jesus as the Son of God, so it seems at least the Baptist saw it, otherwise how could he have testified?

In any case, whether Jesus is the only witness, or Jesus and John, or anyone who was there, or whether the Spirit of God descended literally like a dove or a pigeon, this is an incredibly **powerful** event. The power of the spirit lighting on Jesus is so strong, you can see it - it's physical, tangible, and emphatic. There can be no doubt about that the Spirit has landed on the Son of God.

After the Spirit descends, a voice out of heaven says "*this is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased*". A voice out of heaven is used more than once in the bible to describe, of course, the voice of the God.

This line tells us so much; it's proof that Jesus is the Son of God, and it describes Jesus as beloved of his father. *With him I am well pleased* is interesting. It isn't with him I will be pleased. The Father's love for the Son is not conditional, not to be offered at a later stage after certain contractual obligations are met. The father loves and is delighted with his son.

Jesus already had and was entitled to glory when he was with his father. Jesus refers to this in his prayer in John 17:(5). And there's no doubt that the father has loved his son, and still loves his son, and is pleased with him right now. But Jesus and his father also know, beyond anyone else's knowledge or understanding, what journey Jesus will now embark upon. Right after the baptism, Jesus will go into the desert to experience supreme hardship and temptation, and as we know the servant king will ultimately face unimaginable pain on the cross.

*This is my son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased* must have been **so encouraging** to Jesus. Well done son, I'm proud of you, you're my special little guy.

I have to tell you, that when I moved out from home for the first time, it was very exciting. But after I had got over the initial buzz, and my parents had finished popping the champagne corks at the other end, it was always special to have a phone call, or a parent come over for a coffee. Amongst all the divine power unfolding in this passage, we could almost miss that this is also a tender exchange between a Dad and his son. The son has in a sense left home for a time, his living arrangements with his family are not what they once were. The voice from heaven must have been like the ultimate Skype phone call for Jesus,

Lastly, you might miss it, I know I certainly have on previous reading of this passage, but the baptism of Jesus is an occasion where all the persons of the Trinity are present, the whole family is here! We've obviously got Jesus, the Son, we have the Father God speaking out of heaven, and the Holy Spirit rounds out the trinity. **We believe** in one god, father son and Holy Spirit, and it has to be a **Trinitarian** god that makes this event possible. They're all there.

Thank God that Jesus came and *was* numbered with the transgressors. This is our very salvation unfolding. And now we understand why it would have been a leap for John to follow Jesus' request.

He had to trust, and not lean on his own understanding, even though things appeared very confusing. We should pray that when God's plans are unfolding in our lives, even though we may not understand why God might be doing what he is doing, we might have the faith to do what he asks us to do and to walk where he wants us to go.