

# Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

## The King Goes Public \* Matthew 3:13-17

### Introduction

All right, let's go ahead and take our Bibles and turn to Matthew 3. This morning we have five verses before us, and I have to tell you that I believe they may very well completely blow you away. I say this because that is what they did to me this week.

On the surface, this passage might seem rather benign. It's a story many of us are familiar with, and at first glance there doesn't seem to be all that much going on here. But I have to say that this is far from the truth, and I hope with the Spirit's help you will find that to be the case also. I don't know about you, but for me personally Matthew has been fantastic so far, and I believe the best is yet to come, starting right now with Matthew 3:13-17. Follow along as I read:

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. [14] John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" [15] But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. [16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17 ESV)*

Now, like last week, there are two parts to the message today. We will first talk about Jesus' baptism and then we will take a look at the Father's Response.

### Jesus' Baptism (v. 13-15)

Verse 13 tells us that John the Baptist was ministering at the Jordan River when Jesus comes from Galilee to be baptized. I've got a map that will help us get a little better picture of this. As we have talked about in previous weeks, from the age of about 9 months to 30 years Jesus lived in the town of Nazareth, which was in the region of Galilee. During this time the Bible gives us almost no information about His activities other than one short story in Luke regarding a trip to the temple in Jerusalem when He was 12. But now, here at the end of Matthew 3, Jesus goes public by traveling to the Jordan River, probably somewhere north of the Dead Sea, to request John to baptize Him.

So, Jesus arrives at the Jordan River, likely near the height of John's ministry, and apparently stands in line to be baptized with everyone else. And you can kind of imagine the scene. John baptizes someone, says next, and up walks Jesus. And it's clear from the text that John knows who Jesus is, and therefore is very hesitant to baptize Him. Look at John's response in verse 14:

*"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"*

This would kind of like Billy Graham coming to speak at Harmony and when he gets here having him come forward during the opening song and asking me to baptize him. I would probably say, I really don't think we need to do that Billy. Maybe you should baptize me, but I really don't think I need to baptize you.

And I think we need to recognize two things that John's hesitancy tells us. First, it once again points to our own need for repentance. If John the Baptist, the greatest man to ever be born of a woman needed to repent, than so do we. We talked about this in detail last week, so I won't belabor it here, but John's humility is once again striking and needs to be a continual model of the fact that the Christian life is a life of repentance.

But even more importantly, John's response points us to Jesus' sinlessness. The tense of the verb *prevented* in verse 14 indicates that John repeatedly attempted to dissuade Jesus from being baptized. He repetitively said, "I'm not baptizing you, you need to baptize me." Now, think about this. John had been preaching that everyone needed to repent, especially the religious leaders. And he had been doing so quite vociferously. Yet when Jesus comes to be baptized, John wants nothing of it. Why? Because he knew that Jesus was sinless and therefore didn't need to repent. Now, this is not the focus of our text but it is certainly a key Bible doctrine. Note what Hebrews 4:15 tells us:

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15 ESV)*

You see, in order for Jesus to be the one to provide the sacrifice for our sins He had to be sinless. If Jesus wasn't sinless, than His death on the cross was meaningless and we are still in our sins. But John quite clearly affirms that Jesus was without sin, and therefore had no need to be baptized.

Now, this of course, leads to a significant question. If Jesus was sinless and therefore didn't need to be baptized, why was He? Well, note how Jesus responds in verse 15 to John's hesitation:

*“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness.”*

Jesus basically responds, yes, John, you are correct, I don't need to be baptized, but there are other things in play here. There are other reasons, reasons related to righteousness, why I want to be baptized by you today. And if we look carefully at our passage we can see at least four of them.

## **Why Was Jesus Baptized?**

### **1. To set an example of obedience.**

Number one, Jesus was baptized to set an example of obedience. Right from the beginning of His ministry Jesus desired to express to the world “I want to do the will of God more than anything.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus intends to teach us through His baptism that a decision to be baptized is a decision to live a life of obedience. It is a decision to put aside what we want, to die to ourselves, and to obey the Father no matter what.

Let me be clear that although it isn't popular to stress obedience today, this is what following Jesus is about. Note what Jesus has to say about this matter in John 14:

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15 ESV)*

You see, love for God is much more about what we do than what we say. If we want to know if we love God, we have to take a look at how well we are seeking to obey His commands. So, one of the reasons Jesus was baptized was to give us an example of obediently following the Father.

### **2. To identify with sinners.**

The second reason that Jesus is baptized is to identify with sinners. One of the purposes for which Jesus came into the world was to identify with mankind, and to do so He had to identify with sin. This is why Isaiah 53 predicts that the Messiah would be counted among the transgressors.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner. Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12. Pg. 103. Kindle Edition.

*Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:11-12 ESV)*

You may remember that when we talked about baptism a few months ago we said that in baptism we identify ourselves with Christ. Baptism in part is saying, "I am with Jesus." Well, here in His baptism Jesus is identifying himself with sinners and saying, "I am with them!"

Think for just a second about how amazing that is. That the God of the universe would come to earth and say that He is with us. Kind of mind blowing, isn't it?

### **3. To illustrate salvation.**

So, Jesus is baptized to set an example of obedience and to identify with sinners. At the same time, He is also baptized to illustrate salvation. Once again, we talked about this in the message on baptism, but it is worth noting here as well. At its core baptism is an outward picture of the internal reality that our sins have been washed away and we have been given a new life.

Over and over again in the gospels we see Jesus instructing His disciples that His mission is to bring salvation through His death and resurrection. And so it seems that one purpose in His baptism is to picture this truth right from the very beginning of His ministry.

I think this gives us an indication of how central baptism is to the Christian faith. It's not a coincidence that in Matthew Jesus' ministry both begins and ends with baptism. We do know how Matthew ends, right? With the Great Commission, where Jesus commands His disciples to go out and do what He models for them from the very beginning. To make disciples who have been baptized. And so I want to say to you again, if you have not been baptized, it is time to do so. The Christian life is a life of obedience, and the first step in that obedience is baptism. I also want to say, if you aren't leading people to be baptized, it is time to start doing so. Baptism isn't an add-on to our faith. It's not an optional component. It is at the very heart of the mission that King Jesus has given us.

### **4. To transform John's baptism into spirit baptism.**

Ok, one more. The fourth reason Jesus is baptized is to transform John's baptism into spirit baptism. Now, you are going to have to follow along closely on this one, because it is a little technical. However, it is probably the most important reason for Jesus' baptism. Let's go back to verse 11 for a minute, where John explains the difference between his baptism and Jesus' baptism:

*I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11 ESV)*

Essentially John is saying that his baptism is something that man can do, but Jesus' baptism is something that only the Holy Spirit can do. He is saying that a baptism of repentance is a commitment to live a righteous life, but in order to truly be righteous you need the Holy Spirit. And only Jesus can give the Spirit. You see, John could demand that the people repent, but only Jesus could give them the Holy Spirit. John could point out their sin, but only Jesus could give them the remedy for their sin.

Now, I want to take a moment to discuss the term *spirit baptism*, the kind of baptism that John says Jesus provides. Some would teach that spirit baptism is an event that occurs when the Holy Spirit comes upon a believer at some point after they are saved, in what is also known as a second blessing. In others words, they teach that salvation and spirit baptism are two different events.

However, Scripture is clear that water baptism is a picture of spirit baptism, and that spirit baptism occurs at the moment we are saved. Here is what 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us:

*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13 ESV)*

Or as Paul writes in Ephesians 4:

*There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6 ESV)*

This means that there aren't two classes of Christians – the spiritual and unspiritual. Nor do believers receive different amounts of the Spirit. We all have the same Spirit and the same amount of Him, because Jesus tells us in John 3:34 that the Father gives the Spirit without measure. When you get the Spirit you get all of Him. And so as I have

said before, the question is not how much of the Spirit we have, but rather how much of us the Spirit has.

I think the most important thing in all of this is to recognize that without the Spirit repentance is impossible. Last week we focused on the importance of repentance and in particular that change was a necessary part of repentance. But we have to understand that, without the Holy Spirit, change is impossible. And so a natural application of both this week's message and last week's is that we need to seek the Holy Spirit's presence and work in our lives if we are going to follow Jesus. Without Him we can do absolutely nothing!

### **The Father's Response**

So, that is Jesus' baptism. Let's now move to verses 16-17 to see how God the Father responds to this event. Read the verses with me again:

*And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Eventually John consents to baptize Jesus. And so he takes Jesus, immerses Him in the water, and as Jesus comes out of the water, three things happen. Matthew uses the word *behold* twice in these verses to let us know that these are big things, monumental things. In fact, to get the real sense of how significant this is, replace the word *behold* with a more common expression that we use when we want to get some one's attention. Use *look* with an exclamation point, so that it reads like this:

*And **look!** the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and **look!** a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

So, as Jesus comes out of the water the heavens open. To be honest, I am not sure exactly what this means. Perhaps it is simply that Jesus could look directly into heaven and see the Father. I really don't know. Regardless, it is something special and unusual that is happening. At the same time, the Holy Spirit comes from heaven like a dove and rests on Jesus. Now make sure to note that the Holy Spirit wasn't a dove. The text says *like a dove*. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit, which by default means He doesn't have a body, shape, or form. And so once again I am not exactly sure what this means other than the Holy Spirit was symbolized in some manner by something that looked like a dove. The key point is that the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus. And then the third and

final thing that happens is the Father speaks from heaven. It's interesting that in his gospel Matthew records the Father speaking twice, here and at the transfiguration in chapter 17. And He says the same thing both times. *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

Now, what is all of this about? Once again, there are undoubtedly many things in view here, but I think there are three primary ones that we need to understand.

## **1. God the Father is commissioning God the Son.**

First and foremost, this event is about God the Father commissioning God the Son. So far in Matthew we have seen an angel, the wise men, and John the Baptist testifying that Jesus is the Son of God. And now God the Father affirms that this is indeed the case and commissions Jesus to do the work that He has sent Him to do.

This in essence is the Father's coming out party for Jesus. With His statement in verse 17 the Father is bringing the Old Testament to a climax and publicly declaring that Jesus is the one in whom all of its prophecies and promises will be fulfilled. He is saying that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and He has my full stamp of approval.

Now, imagine how wonderful it must have been for Jesus to hear these words from His Father, to know that He was pleasing to Him in every way. One of the things we don't want to miss in this passage is the deep love that the Father and Son have for one another. The Son shows His love for the Father by willingly submitting to the Father's plan for Him to come to earth and die for the sins of the world. And the Father affirms His love for the Son by calling Him beloved and saying that He is well pleased with Him. The term *beloved* here refers to the deep, rich, profound relationship<sup>2</sup> that the Father and Son have with one another.

Now, it's probably somewhat difficult for us to apprehend the significance of what is happening here, but you have to understand how people would have thought of Jesus at this point. He doesn't have any followers yet. He won't start selecting disciples until chapter 4. To this point He has lived His entire life in the backwoods town of Nazareth serving as an apprentice carpenter to His earthly father Joseph. He had performed no miracles, He had preached zero sermons, and He had no halo around His head. From all appearances, He was just an average first-century Jewish guy. There appears to be nothing special about Him at all. No one would have expected any of this. The only person who recognized anything at all was John, and so in this scene

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<sup>2</sup> MacArthur, John (2001). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press

God the Father wants to make sure that everyone knows who Jesus is. He desires to let everyone know that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is very proud to call Him His Son.

## **2. All three members of the Trinity are involved in the Son's mission.**

Now, while Jesus' commissioning is the primary issue at hand, there are two other matters that deserve attention. One is directed to our heads, and the other to our hearts.

In relationship to our heads, or better stated our theology, this passage displays for us the doctrine of the Trinity, specifically in the fact that all three members of the Trinity are involved in the Son's mission. In this passage we see the Father commissioning the Son, the Son accepting the mission, and the Spirit empowering the Son for the mission. And since this is one of the clearest texts in Scripture on the doctrine of the Trinity, let's take some time to review this essential Bible doctrine.

As we do, let me be up front and note that if you go searching for the Word *Trinity* in the Bible, you won't find it. The Bible never uses the word *Trinity*; rather it is a word theologians use to identify what the Bible teaches about the nature of God. That said, while the Bible is clear in what it teaches about the Trinity, it is not humanly possible to completely understand this doctrine, and we need to be ok with that. You will probably leave today scratching your heads somewhat and saying, "I just don't get it." And that's ok. Listen, if we could perfectly understand everything about God than He wouldn't be a very big God would He? But what we can do is understand and affirm what God reveals to us about Himself, and it is absolutely essential that we do so. So, here in a nutshell is the Biblical teaching on the Trinity. I have found Wayne Grudem's explanation of this doctrine to be the most helpful, and so I am relying heavily upon him here. He explains the Trinity in three points: there is one God, God is three persons, and each person is fully God.<sup>3</sup> Let's walk through each of these points briefly:

- **There is one God.**

First, there is one God.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4 ESV)*

*I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God. (Isaiah 45:5 ESV)*

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<sup>3</sup> Grudem, Wayne. Pg. 231 – 239. (1994) *Systematic Theology – An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5 ESV)*

As Christians we are monotheists; we believe in one God. Not two gods, not three gods, not 33 million gods, but one God.

- **God is three persons – Father, Son, and Spirit.**

At the same time, God is also three persons. We see this clearly here in our passage today, as well as in numerous other passages. For example, the Great Commission. Jesus tells His disciples:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19 ESV)*

Another passage would be 1 Peter 1:

*According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. (1 Peter 1:2 ESV)*

So, combining points one and two we have one God in three persons.

- **All three persons are fully God.**

Finally, all three persons are fully God. The Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God. Scripture is clear on this as well:

*At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children." (Matthew 11:25 ESV)*

So, the Father is fully God.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1 ESV)*

The Word here, of course, is Jesus. And Jesus is fully God and has always been so.

*But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? [4] While it remained unsold, did it not*

*remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."*

*(Acts 5:3-4 ESV)*

Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit and Peter says that this means he is lying to God Himself.

To review, there is one God in three persons with each person being fully God.

Now I realize that this may make your brain spin a little bit (or a lot), but once again, that's ok because Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us this:

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. [9] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9 ESV)*

Since this is the case – and we want it to be – there are some things that we must receive on faith and affirm even when we don't completely get them. I affirm that my wife thinks differently than me even though I will never understand how. I affirm that people like the Green Bay Packers even though for the life of me I don't understand why. I affirm that some people enjoy *Les Miserables* even though it makes no sense to me.

All joking aside it is essential that we affirm what the Bible teaches about the Trinity, even if we don't completely understand. Here is why. As someone once said, "try to understand the Trinity and you will lose your mind, try to deny it and you will lose your soul." You see, when we deny what Scripture teaches about God, even if we don't understand it, we deny our salvation along with it. And we can even see this in our passage today. If you take one of the members of the Trinity out of this event, you lose everything. If the Father isn't involved we have no one commissioning the Son. He's just doing this on His own. And If the Son isn't involved, you have no one carrying out the mission. And if the Spirit isn't involved you have no power for the mission. And remember what the mission is - why did Jesus come? He came to seek and save the lost. So, if you throw away the Trinity, what do you throw away with it? You throw away your salvation.

### **3. The amazing love the Father has for us.**

So, that was for your head. The Trinity is an essential, fundamental Bible doctrine. Let's now consider something for our hearts. The third and final thing we need to see in the Father's response to the Son's baptism is the amazing love He has for us. Now, you

may remember way back in the introduction that I said this message might blow your mind. And if it didn't on the Trinity, I hope it will with this point. I want you to see in this passage two truths that display God's mind-blowing love for us.

One, we see His love in the fact that He willingly sent His beloved Son to rescue us. The word *beloved* can also be translated *priceless*. To the Father the Son is priceless. He is incapable of being replaced. And yet the Father was willing to send Him to die for us.

Think about this. Earlier we talked about the great love the Father and Son have for one another. Honestly, it is a greater love than we can imagine. Consider the person you love the most in all the world and magnify the feelings you have for them times 100, and you will be getting just a glimpse of how much the Father loves the Son.

Now, let me ask you, what is the hardest thing to experience with someone you love? Most of us would probably say to see that person hurt. I can tell you that I have a deep love for my children and the hardest thing in the world is to see them hurt. Just this week we got word that our little girl in China was hospitalized. Thankfully she is back in the orphanage now, but I have to tell you that hurt, especially since we weren't able to be there for her. Now, imagine the pain the Father experienced as His Son hung on that cross. What's more, consider His anguish as He had to turn His back on His Son's suffering because of the sin that was placed upon Him. Do you remember what Jesus cried out as he hung on the cross? *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!* The pain of the cross was unbearable for both the Father and the Son. And yet they willingly endured it. And why? Because of the love they have for you and me. Listen friends, and I know you have heard this many times before, if you ever doubt that God loves you, you only have to go to the cross and see what He was willing to go through for you. So, today, be blown away by the love that God has shown you through His Son.

But as if that wasn't enough, there is another way in which we see God's love in this passage. One that we are much less familiar with, but one that I am convinced we desperately need. I want every believer in this room to look at the Father's statement in verse 17 and realize that because Christ identified with you in your sin God the Father speaks these words to you as well. Do you realize that? Do you know that? Do you know that you are God's beloved son or daughter, in whom He is well pleased?

I recognize that this is the first time some of you have heard this. Or perhaps you have heard it but don't believe it. But let me take you to 2 Corinthians 5:21 for a moment:

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)*

Jesus, the Son of God, the only one who never sinned, took your sin upon Himself so that you could be given His righteousness. Jesus lived the righteous life that we couldn't. He lived the perfectly obedient life to God that none of us have or ever will. He is the only one to whom God could say, "this is my beloved Son in whom I am perfectly pleased." But, because of His great love for us, God took His Son and gave Him our unrighteousness, our sin, our imperfection, and in exchange gave us Christ's righteousness. So now, when God looks at us, He says, "*you are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" What a wonderful truth. What a life-changing reality.

This means we don't have to work for God's approval. We don't have to spend our life trying to earn His love. And we don't have to fear that we will one day lose it. Why? Because the Father's love and approval for Jesus never changes, that means it will never change for us either. Jesus will always have the Father's love and approval, and therefore those who have trusted in Him will also.

Let me tell you why this is so important. Every one of us is born with a need for approval. We all want to be accepted and loved. And because of this, we do everything possible to earn approval from our parents, our spouses, our employers, and our friends. The problem is that nothing we do and no one we know can give us the approval we desire. We can't earn it and there is no one on earth who can give it. There is only one way it can be had. And that is by receiving it. God the Father offers it to every single one of us today, simply by trusting in His Son.

Some of us here today have this approval, and just need to realize it. We need to stop trying to earn our way and rest in the fact the God has already granted it to us. That regardless if our parents or spouses or employer approve us, we can rest in the fact that God does. That regardless of our track record or what sins we have in our past or present, God loves us and finds us well pleasing to Him.

But then there are those here who do not have God's approval. Let me tell you if you don't have it, this is what you have been longing for all of your life. This is what you have been looking for. And God offers it to you for free if you will simply repent of your sins and turn to Him.

Let me finish with a quick illustration. During one of my flights on my Africa trip last month I watched the movie *Walk the Line*, which is the story of the first half of the life of Johnny Cash. It's the typical tragic story of a life dedicated to sex, drugs, and rock and roll. But the underlying issue of Cash's life is clearly the fact that no matter how successful he became, he could never gain his father's approval. And he nearly ruined his life trying to do so. Unfortunately, the movie ends without telling the best part of the story. You see, there was a point in time where Johnny Cash stopped trying to find

his approval through his earthly father, and instead found it in his heavenly one. And this completely transformed his life. He gave up pursuing approval through the things of the world and found it in Jesus Christ. Now, I would never suggest Johnny Cash as a model Christian or anything close. But the two parts of his life provide a great picture of the difference between someone who seeks approval on their own rather than by receiving the approval that God freely gives. And so, if you are a believer, I urge you to rest in the approval that God has given you. And if you are not, I urge you to receive the approval that He freely gives today.

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