

*I heard about a guy out in Texas who invited a lot of bachelors out to his ranch for a BBQ. When he got them all together, he stood up before them and said, “Look over the edge at that little lake on my ranch. I’ve filled it with alligators.” He said, “If there is anyone willing to get in there with those gators and go from this end of the lake to the other side, I’ll give you one of three things. I’ll give you a 500-acre ranch, or a million dollars in cash, or the hand of my daughter in marriage. Whichever one you want.”*

*He had no sooner said it than “splash,” somebody went into the water. The rancher looked over the edge and there was a guy in that lake that didn’t even take his shoes off – still wearing his nice suit. He was flying across the lake as fast as humanly possible. Water was splashing and alligators were snapping and thrashing trying to chase him down, but he made it all the way to the other side.*

*He climbed out of the lake soaking wet, but without a scratch on him. He was completely exhausted, trying to get his breath. The rich Texan went over to him and this is what he said, “Son, I meant this as a practical joke. I didn’t really mean for anyone to swim that water, but you did it and I’m as good as my word. So, which one do you want, the 500-acre ranch, the one million dollars in cash, or my daughter’s hand in marriage?”*

*The young man looked at the rich Texan and said, “I don’t want none of them. I just want to get my hands on the guy who pushed me in the water! That’s what I want!”*

This morning, we are going to look at a very familiar passage involving two people who entered the water by choice – they were pushed, but rather they were drawn to the water by God for the sake of righteousness.

Last week, Matthew introduced us to the ministry of John the Baptist – this rough and tough guy, dressed in camel’s hair, munching on grasshoppers and honey, who was out there in the desert, in the region of Judea, along the Jordan River. If you remember, John was preaching to multitudes of people, from all walks of life, who were coming out to see him and to hear him, and he was baptizing many of them with a baptism of repentance in preparation for the King who was on His way.

That’s the setting for our next passage, so, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 3** and we will pick up where we left off beginning with **verse 13**, where Matthew tells us:

**<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?”**

When we last saw Jesus at the end of **Matthew 2**, He was still a child, somewhere around two years old, settling into the home of his upbringing in Nazareth, but **then** – but here, Jesus is now some 30 years old – so there’s this huge gap of information about Him up to this point.

Now we know from **Luke**, that even as a youngster, Jesus was devoted to His Father in heaven, and if you remember His trip to Jerusalem at the age of 12, Jesus got separated from His parents Joseph and Mary who were on their way back home before realizing they left Jesus behind, and after three days, Jesus was eventually discovered in the temple discussing the Law with the religious teachers – apparently, the temple very last place Joseph and Mary thought to look, and when Mary asked Jesus where He had been and what He was doing – questions any concerned mom would ask, we hear the very first words ever recorded by Jesus – *“Why is it you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?”*

Often times, when reading something, we miss the tone and the inflection in the voice, but I have no doubt that in a very respectful way, as a youngster, Jesus said this as a way of gently reminding His parents that His Father was God, and as such, His life was not His own. The Father had already laid out a plan for Him and He would follow that plan.

Well after this, we are told that Jesus returned with His parents back to Nazareth where He was submissive to them and He grew in wisdom and stature.

Jesus lived His life in Nazareth, in obscurity, as a carpenter’s son and later Jesus would follow in the footsteps of Joseph and become a carpenter Himself. Day in and day out, except for the Sabbath, Jesus was a builder – that’s what the word *carpenter* means in the Greek – He’s a builder – a fitting occupation for the Creator of everything and the fixer of broken things, working with wood, and maybe even working with stone and metal, involved in all types of projects for the people in the community. That’s what Jesus was doing, in fact, if you think about it, except for the last three years, that’s what He does for most of His earthly life. He’s a builder.

So, as Jesus is covered in rock chips and sawdust in Nazareth, John the Baptist is further south in the desert of Judea along the Jordan River. I’m guessing he’s been

there for several months, preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand because the King is coming, and he's baptizing multitudes of people in the river as an act of repentance. Then one day, Jesus leaves all that He has known, makes His way down south, shows up at the river, and gets in line for His turn in waist-deep water.

John baptizes the person in front of Jesus, maybe he says a few parting words to the person, and then he looks up, and there is Jesus standing right in front of him, and in essence John says "*Whoa!*"

Now, I wrestled with this for hours, because I don't know what John knows about Jesus at this point. I mean at this point, John has not seen the sign of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove to confirm His true identity, but evidently John knew enough or maybe he sensed enough by the Spirit's prompting to cause him to step back in the water and humbly say to Jesus "*How can I baptize You? I'm not worthy. If anything, You should baptize me.*"

John is completely humbled in the presence of Jesus, and somehow, someway, John knows, without any shadow of doubt, that Jesus is far more superior and truly righteous, and so he's reluctant to baptize Jesus, and with that, Jesus has some insightful words for John, and in **verse 15**, this is what we are told:

**But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.**

So, Jesus tells John that this baptism should be permitted, as it was a necessary step in order to **fulfill all righteousness** – it's a step in the right direction, and I want you to notice in this verse, that this was something both John and Jesus were to do together. **Do you see the word "us" in the verse?** This baptism was fitting for the sake of righteousness for both of them – not just Jesus. Both John and Jesus were doing something of great symbolic importance.

For John, he was the one who had been crying out in the wilderness – "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" He was the voice from God that Isaiah spoke about long ago. He was the forerunner of the Messiah – clearing the way, so for John, it was fitting to baptize Jesus as a symbolic way of "*passing the torch*" if you will.

For Jesus, it was fitting to *take the torch*, and to set into motion the promises that were foretold about Him in the Old Testament, but that's not all.

Jesus entered the same water, just like the people around Him, so that He may identify with them. This is why Jesus, the Son of God, left heaven in the first place and came to earth as a human being – to live *among* us – to identify *with* us – to be tempted just *like* us in all things – and yet without sin, so that He might faithfully endure the full wrath of God *for* us. This was God’s plan for Jesus all along – to identify with humanity, and this baptism in the river in waist-deep water was a step in that direction.

For Jesus, this baptism also served as an example for those who would later follow Him. Jesus was a model of humility as He obediently submitted to the will of His Father in heaven. Jesus was completely sinless – a baptism of repentance was not necessary for He had nothing to repent of – however, Jesus still modeled for us, in a simple way, what humble obedience looks like by surrendering to the will of the Father. As an act of humble obedience, we are to follow the example that Jesus set for us, because – and this is a sobering thought – others might be following our example.

*A three-year-old was on the heels of his mother everywhere she walked around the house. Time and time again she’d trip over her small son. She suggested her son play with his toys, but he said he was okay and said, “I’d rather be here with you.” Then he continued to bounce happily along behind her.*

*After stepping on her toes for the fifth time, she began to lose patience. The mother asked him why he was acting this way and he looked up with his soft blue eyes and said, “Well, Mommy, my Sunday School teacher told me to walk in Jesus’ footsteps, but I can’t see Him, so I’m walking in yours.”*

So, we need to follow the Lord’s example in humility and submission, for there are those who could be following ours.

Now, there is one more thing I want to mention about this baptism. As a Christian, when we are emersed in the water like Jesus – we are also looking *back* to the death, and the burial, and the resurrection of our Lord – that’s the picture that water baptism paints for us, but when Jesus was baptized by John, maybe He was looking *ahead* to the very same thing – anticipating His own death, and burial, and resurrection on our behalf – on behalf of the lost and guilty sinners He had come to save.

So, as a step in the right direction for both of them to fulfill all righteousness, John baptizes Jesus, and that brings us to **verse 16**.

**<sup>16</sup> After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”**

When Jesus came up out of the water, there was an immediate confirmation by His family. If you notice, in this scene – Jesus, the Son of God, sees the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and He heard his Father’s approval. This scene was something like a family reunion, like a graduation ceremony, where all three persons of the Trinity are present.

And if John did not know exactly who Jesus was before – after experiencing all of this – there’s no doubt now – he knows for sure. Jesus is the King and the Messiah he been preaching about all along.

Like a dove, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and a voice from heaven is heard – **“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”** And, I want to speak on this for a moment.

The Greek language here indicates that God the Father not only found delight in Jesus at that moment, but that the Father had always found delight in Jesus, and that’s important and I like what *Joe Focht* had to say about this passage for he gave me a lot to think about.

As you know, for many years, Jesus had worked hard in the carpenter’s shop – I imagine often drenched in sweat and covered with all sorts of building materials, and the Father was saying I was well pleased with Him then. The Father was pleased when Jesus consoled Mary after her husband Joseph had died. Mary would become a widow. The Father was pleased when Jesus spoke to His half-brothers and half-sisters about the things of God, and later after the Lord’s resurrection, **James** and **Jude** would come to follow Jesus, and even write books that were included in the New Testament.

The Father was pleased with Jesus – He had always been pleased with Him, before Jesus went public, before He had ever preached a sermon, before He had ever performed a miracle, before He went to battle with the self-righteous religious leaders, before He would forgive sins, before the cross – the Father was pleased with Jesus and that’s important because sometimes we separate the *secular* from the *sacred* suggesting that one is more important than the other.

Yes, they are different, but if you are His – – if you are His, then be His carpenter, be His auto mechanic, be His computer programmer, be His rancher and farmer, be His secretary, be His mother in the home raising children, be His Sunday School teacher, whatever the case may be, where ever God has uniquely placed you – then be His in that role for He is delighted in you and one day you will hear “*Well done good and faithful servant.*”

The Father was already well-pleased with His Son, He makes that announcement from heaven, and then from the Jordan River, there’s no time to celebrate – Jesus is immediately led by the Holy Spirit into the barren wilderness to be tempted by Satan for some 40 days – and we will dive into that experience next week, but after His time in the wilderness, Jesus returns to the river, back to John the Baptist again – and that’s where I want to pick up.

In the Gospel of **John**, written by the Apostle John – not John the Baptist, in **Chapter 1** beginning with **verse 29**, we read this:

*<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> This is He on behalf of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ <sup>31</sup> I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” <sup>32</sup> John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. <sup>33</sup> I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup> I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God.” <sup>35</sup> Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*

This had to be an interesting time for John the Baptist. Of all the great Old Testament prophets who have ever prophesied about the coming King and Messiah, John the Baptist is the only prophet who physically gets to look Jesus in the face – to see Him eye to eye. He’s seen Jesus – he’s even baptized Him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus like a dove confirming, in fact, He is the **Son of God**. It was an unbelievable moment for John – surely the pinnacle of his entire ministry.

Now, after Jesus had been baptized and after spending some 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, once again, Jesus returns to the Jordan River

where John is still preaching and baptizing – just little further north this time, and in this passage, we are told that Jesus is noticed by John the Baptist who was there with two of his own disciples, and John says to them,

**“Behold, the Lamb of God.”** That word *“behold”* – in this context, is another way of saying *“Look at Him.”* That’s what John commands his own disciples to do – *“Look at Him, that’s the Lamb of God.* John comes from a priestly family line, and he knows that millions of lambs had been sacrificed at the temple, but here, in essence he says, *“That’s the Lamb – God’s perfect Lamb – the Lamb that God Himself has sent as a sacrifice to take away the sin of the world.”* *“Look at Him”* – that’s what John says to those around him who are listening, and today, I think that’s what John would also say to us as well, *“Look at Him.”*

The world is going crazy – *look at Him.* In our society, we are tempted to *do* what we should not *do*, to *have* what we do not or should not *have*, and in sinful pride to *be* what we should not *be* – *look at Him.* Our nation no longer seems to be a nation under God as we pledge – don’t look to Washington for an answer – don’t look to a political party for a remedy, don’t look to the President or a future President as some sort of savior – *look at Him.*

Your life may appear to be falling apart – *look at Him.* It may seem you’re in the lion’s den, surrounded and threatened by those who want to eat you alive – *look at Him.* You may feel that nobody understands you, nobody cares for you, and nobody loves you – *look at Him.*

Warren Wiersbe says, *“Look at others and be distressed. Look at yourself and be depressed. Look at Him, and you’ll be blessed.”*

In passing the torch, John told his own disciples *“Behold – look at Him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world”* and they left John, and rightly so, and they followed Jesus. Look at Him and follow Him – that’s my encouragement for you this morning.

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