

The Covenantal Divide: The Anointing of Jesus, Part 1

Luke 3:21-22

Jesus baptism was the context of his anointing by God for the unique role and the special ministry as Israel's Messiah. We're gonna start by reading those two verses, then I'll make a few comments just by way of review. It says in Luke 3:21, "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.'"

Luke has structured the text to emphasize for his readers, this supernatural phenomena. He wants to draw our attention to the divine activity, to this dramatic invasion, an intrusion of the invisible world, into the visible world. And as you can see here in the text, there's a progression, the heavens opened, the Spirit descended, and a voice came out of heaven. That's a logical progression, but it's also a dramatic progression. Because it's what the father says, at the very end there. That

is the climax of the text. That's the moment in history when God intervened. It happened when all the people were baptized, after Jesus was baptized, happened while he was praying.

When all the people were baptized, that is, during John's baptism ministry, probably toward the end of it, the final months before his arrest and imprisonment that Luke just recorded in verse 18. John had been expecting this sign from heaven, the Spirit descending on the Christ, John had looked forward to that. At one level, that's what this is about really, the immediate purpose of the heavenly signs are that God intended to reveal the Messiah to John.

In fact, when you go over to Matthew's account, the voice from heaven, when that voice speaks, it speaks directly to John, not to Jesus, but about Jesus, this, pointing to Jesus, this the voice says, "This is my beloved son, with whom I'm well pleased." Here, the voice speaks directly to Jesus, right? Both things were said. God pointed to Jesus and said to John, "This is my beloved son." And then he also spoke to Jesus, "You are my beloved son." That's how those harmonize. God was telling John, who the Messiah was, God was identifying him to John as the Messiah, the Son of God.

God showed John here, so that he could fulfill his own ministry so he could point to the Messiah, he was sent to direct Israel's attention to Jesus. So John came expecting a sign from heaven. Jesus didn't expect a sign; he didn't come seeking a sign. He simply came "seeking to fulfill all righteousness," as Matthew 3 says. Jesus had judged John to be a true prophet of God. So at the most basic level, Jesus came to obey the command of God's prophet.

That was one aspect of his fulfilling all righteousness, but further, Jesus knew that his time had come. He had studied Scripture. He knew the significance of John's ministry that John was a forerunner to the Messiah. In fact, whenever John was questioned by the inquisitive public, whenever he was interrogated by the religious authorities, he didn't describe himself as the Messiah. He didn't describe himself as the Christ. John described himself as "A voice of one crying in the wilderness." He described himself as one who said, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

John knew his Bible. He knew that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus knew his Bible as well. He knew the prophecies of Isaiah 40, Malachi 3, Malachi 4. Jesus knew that John's ministry was a signal, that it was a sign to him, that it was time for him to

come forward to leave the obscurity of Nazareth, and enter into public ministry. So Jesus came forward then, in obedience to John as a true prophet of God, he also came forward in anticipation of his own calling, came forward in obedience to his own calling as well.

The occasion the obedience of Jesus, still looking at verse 21, which shows us not just the setting, but also the occasion of this divine phenomenon here, "When all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized, and was praying." That is to say, when this heavenly phenomena happened, whereas it happened, it happened on the occasion of Jesus' obedience to the father's will, don't want you to miss that. It's very important that we see Jesus is here, obeying. He is here, we might summarize this by saying it happened to Jesus. So this all happened when Jesus, after submitting and while praying; after submitting, while worshiping, that's what's going on here in the waters of baptism.

Jesus discerned the deep theological significance of his own baptism. Jesus had no sin, to be coming forward to a baptism of repentance, right? He didn't come on his own behalf because he had any sin. He had no sin. Jesus came, he knew his baptism represented the wider scope of redemptive history and that's why

Jesus encouraged John to go ahead and baptize him. Even though it didn't fully make sense to John. He said, "Let it be so now for thus it is fitting," or proper or appropriate "for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus saw the deeper significance to the simple act of obedience. We read from Isaiah 53 verse 4 said, "Surely he has borne our griefs. He carried our sorrows." And verse 5 says, "He was pierced for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed." You hear all that?

That is, there's a, he in that passage and an, us. There's a, him and there's an, ours, there's a, we and then there's, him. Reading that chapter of prophecy from Isaiah, Jesus knew he had to be numbered with the transgressors. He knew, though he was sinless himself, yet he would bear the sin of many. It was this identification with sinners in the waters of John's baptism of repentance, by the show of solidarity with sinful men and sinful women. Jesus embraced his role as Isaiah's suffering servant.

Jesus knew he would bear the punishment for the sins of his people, that he would suffer as a substitutionary sacrifice. "He was the very Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

And that's what theologians referred to as the passive obedience of Christ, not just passive in the fact that he didn't have an active role. The word passive is here, the Latin word *passio*, which means suffering, so Jesus embraced the suffering. But Jesus also knew from reading the Old Testament and understanding it's theology, that he would act as the representative head of a new race of people, where the first Adam had failed, leading the entire human race into sin. Jesus knew that he, he was the last Adam, the one who had come to fulfill all righteousness. The one whose active obedience would be reckoned or imputed or transferred to his people. Where'd Jesus get that idea?

Again, he'd read Isaiah 53:11, which says plainly, "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous." Accounted, that's the word reckoned, that's the word imputed. God intended to make "him who knew no sin to be sin." That's the passive, *passive*, obedience idea, so that his people would become in Christ, the very righteousness of God. That's the active obedience part, every act of Christ's obedience, no matter how small, it all mattered, it all mattered for our justification.

"Just as by the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners," Romans 5:19, "So by the one man's obedience, the many

will be made righteous." I am so thankful that Jesus was meticulous about obedience, aren't you? Because that is applied to us, beloved, every act no matter how great, no matter how small, he gave this to us as a gift to all who believe. You ever failed to execute your own obedience to God in a completely perfect way? Yes, you do, you fail to do it exactly perfect way, we all do. Right? I'm so thankful that he obeyed God, with absolute precision and perfection.

Nothing less than the undiminished glory of God and our salvation was at stake. And listen beloved, that's what we owe to him, don't we? Precision in our thinking, excellence in our obedience. We owe to God excellence in our worship and our praise, excellence. We don't slough our way through life as Christians, certainly not through church life, certainly not through worship. We're not half hearted or lazy, about our Christian life.

Listen, God gave his very best to secure our salvation, his Son. Jesus Christ gave his very best to glorify God and to secure our salvation. And beloved, as we follow God, we give our very best, as an offering of praise as an offering of gratitude that is due to our great God, amen? Now after submitting to God's will for his life, after submitting to this simple act of

obedience, Jesus emerges, comes up out of the waters of baptism and he's praying.

So what was Jesus praying about here? What's he praying about? What's on his mind? Philip Ryken says, "We really can't know." But then he goes on to suggest a few things Jesus might have been praying about. He's curious too, just as we are, even if he says we can't know and ultimately Ryken is right. We can't read Jesus' mind here. It's not recorded for us. But I believe that we can discern and ascertain what was at least part of the subject of Jesus' prayers.

I think we can learn from the divine response. Prayer is one of the significant themes of Luke's Gospel. It started with the people of God, the faithful praying at the temple in Luke 1:10. While Zachariah was officiating at the hour of incense, it says, "The people were there praying." Anna, she is exemplified here as one of the prayerful believers. A faithful believer. Says in Luke 2:37 that, "She didn't depart from the temple. She stayed there worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day."

She is an exemplary believer, Simeon also, he prayed in a moment of spontaneous joy when he saw the child Jesus at the temple. And Luke records the substance of his prayer in Luke 2:28-32. So Luke is already just in these first couple chapters



of introduction, he's already been emphasizing the subject of prayer, which is a mark of genuine faith, true believers, those who have faith are those who pray. They pray, in fact, without ceasing, believers are in a constant attitude of prayer.

And listen, there is no greater demonstration of your spiritual maturity, no greater demonstration of the strength of your faith and with, whether or not you pray, and the substance of your praying as well. Why? Because prayer, unlike almost every other virtue that we exercise in the Christian life, prayer demands that we believe in an invisible God, in a God that we cannot see, that we believe his power to be active and effective, that we believe that his heart is inclined toward us. Prayer requires great faith. And that's why prayer was often the subject of Jesus' teaching.

In fact, it was after observing Jesus in prayer that his disciples asked him Luke 11:1, "Lord teach us to pray." Believers want to know how to pray, and they want to know not just how to pray, but how to pray well, effectively. Jesus is eager to oblige them, teaching them how to pray. Why? Because he loved them. He wanted them to be in communion with his father, just as he is in communion with his father. Jesus knew how vital prayer would be to their spiritual health, to his disciples'

spiritual sustenance, to even their protection from sin and temptation.

Jesus warned them Luke 22:40, he said, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." In verse 46, Luke 22, "After finding his disciples sleeping, overcome with sorrow." He didn't just sympathize with their weakness, though he did. He didn't stroke them and say, there, there, that's okay, I realize you're tired. This is tough for you. He rebuked them it says in Luke 22:46, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Evidently not entering into temptation was more important than sleep.

That exhortation is so profound that it became the key text in John Owen's classic treatise, that treatise is called, this *"Of temptation, the nature and power of it, the danger of entering into it and the means of preventing that danger with a resolution of sundry cases there unto belonging."* I'll readily acknowledge that titling has come a long way since the 17th century.

But those 60 pages have been used mightily of the Lord, to help many believers in the battle against temptation. And is based on that verse, "Rise and pray, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Jesus taught his disciples with a

parable in Luke 18:1-8 to the effect that believers ought always to pray and not lose heart, just like a persistent widow, petitioning an unrighteous judge, a judge in the seat of power, a hardened man, no sympathy for the widows' plight, and a weak widow, nothing to commend her, no strength, no power of her own and yet because of her persistence, she overcame the will of this unrighteous judge.

God is not an unrighteous judge. He's a benevolent God who loves, how much more will he answer our prayers. But Jesus ended that parable with a rhetorical question of a warning. And he ended it saying, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" That is, will Jesus find people praying, when he returns? Petitioning God continually, daily, seeking him in earnest, fervent prayer.

Prayer is important beloved, and it's modeled here by Jesus himself, was a key factor in our Savior's life as Luke records him praying throughout the entire Gospel narrative, as it says in Luke 5:16, "That he would often withdraw to a desolate place and pray." The other Gospels show Jesus praying before meals, which is why we pray before meals, right? Praying before feeding the 5,000, before feeding the 4,000, I just feed seven or eight

or nine at my table, but feeding the 4,000. Feeding at the Last Supper.

He's praying before a meal with the Emmaus Road disciples. Prayer was Jesus constant habit. It was his way of life. Luke records him praying, especially before big events and significant decisions, we find that in Luke 6:12, where it says, "In these days, Jesus went to the mountain to pray. And all night he continued in prayer to God." A nightly vigil of prayer, a nighttime to vigil. When day came, he did what? He called his disciples, and he chose from them 12, whom he named apostles.

So the naming of the 12, pretty important decision, right? Pretty significant. Jesus knew the significance of that decision, the far-reaching impact, and so he bathed it in prayer, as it says, "All night, he continued in prayer to God." Later on in Luke 9:18, he was praying in private, he was praying alone. And after praying, he turned to his disciples and he elicited from Peter, he drew out from Peter, what we've come to call, "The Great confession." Which was about Jesus' true identity. Jesus asked, "Who do the people say that I am?" And they had a number of answers. Then he said, "But you, who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "The Christ of God." Right

answer, Peter. That is the mark of a true disciple to know who Jesus is, right? The Christ of God.

Transfiguration occurred in that same chapter and Jesus said, "I tell you truly, there are some standing here, who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God." And then starting in Luke 9:28, it says this, "About eight days after these things, after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain," Again, what? To pray, "To pray, and as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white." Transfiguration.

So before choosing the 12, he was praying. Before he revealed his identity as the Messiah he was praying. Before revealing his divine glory, letting his disciples see the coming Kingdom of God and his glory, he was praying. In Luke 22:40-50, when Jesus was in agony, over his impending arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, his betrayal. Guess what? He was praying. Before every major event in his life, every major turning point, Jesus was in prayer. So here at the outset of his messianic ministry, what do you suppose he's praying about? Remember, Jesus had known his true identity at least since he was 12 years of age. He has been waiting in prayerful, studied anticipation

for 18 years, he's been living in obscurity, in quiet submission to his earthly parents. And the more he studied Scripture, the clearer his own life and purpose became.

And now, knowing the prophetic significance of John, the forerunner to the Messiah, what might have been the subject of Jesus' prayers? As he emerged from the waters of baptism? Perhaps it went something like this. Father, is now the time, is it now? When do you plan to anoint me for the ministry to which you've called me? Isaiah had to have been on his mind, one passage in particular, because of its connection here between the Spirit and empowerment for messianic ministry, Isaiah 61:1-3, it says this, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified."

What a rich text. This time, called the year of the Lord's favor, this good news to the poor, this healing for the brokenhearted, freedom for prison captives, comfort, gladness, praise, righteousness, all of that blessing cascaded out of that first crucial sentence. The indispensable prerequisite is this, the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has, what? Anointed me. You say, But wasn't the Holy Spirit always with Jesus? Absolutely, you're dead on, that's right. The overshadowing power of the Most High, Luke 1:35 sent the Holy Spirit to cause the supernatural conception. And ever since he was conceived, Jesus had with him the abiding presence of the Spirit.

But Jesus also recognized the need for the anointing of the spirit, the activating of the spirit, to send him into service. And that had to be on his mind at this moment. That I believe, folks is what Jesus was praying about. And God answered that prayer. And he answered emphatically, didn't he? So after submitting, while praying, God responded.