

The Covenantal Divide: The Baptism of Jesus, Part 2

Luke 3:21-22

We need to ask a very fundamental question before we go any further. And it's this question: Why did Jesus come to be baptized at all? What prompted this? Luke 3:3 tells us that John came proclaiming a baptism of repentance, for what? The forgiveness of sins. Jesus didn't have any sins. He did not need to repent of anything. Why, then, is a perfect man, a sinless man coming forward to be baptized by John?

In John chapter 1 verses 29 to 30, John the Baptist tells us the most immediate reason for Jesus coming to be baptized. It tells us the immediate reason for his own ministry; had everything to do with being able to identify Jesus as the Messiah, as the Christ, pointing people to him, telling people to follow him. It says, "The next day," verse 29, John 1, "The next day, he," that is, John, "saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'" The problem is

prior to Jesus' baptism. As I said, John and Jesus had never met, right? Look at verse 31, John admitted it, "'I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'"

And you say how could John not know Jesus? I mean, weren't they cousins? Didn't they have family reunions and eat potato salad together and go run and swing on trees? No, they didn't. They were separated in their childhood. John grew up in isolation in the Judean wilderness, and Jesus grew up in the domestic life in the town of Nazareth. The two men were called and separated and prepared by God for different purposes. John had not seen Jesus, and yet God sent John to identify Jesus, to point Jesus out as the Christ to the rest of Israel. How was he going to do that if he had never ever met him? How is John going to be able to identify a man he'd never seen? Well, God sent John to baptize, and look at verse 32, "John bore witness, 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" John testifies verse 34, "I have seen and I have born witness that this the Son of God.'"

John had asked God, "How am I supposed to identify the Christ, someone I've never met?" God told him, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." All of these heavenly signs, the opening of the heavens, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the authenticating voice of God, all of that most immediately was for John to witness personally. This was not for public consumption, which is another reason I believe John baptized Jesus in private, or a semi-private baptism.

None of the crowds saw the signs that John saw, or if they saw them, they didn't discern what was going on. God showed John who the Messiah was. He's the immediate target of this sign. And then John went and spread the word to all of Israel. God, again, gave his special revelation to his prophet, then he intended the people to listen to the prophetic voice coming out of John; the prophetic word. So since John watched Jesus receive this anointing of the Spirit, John could absolutely, certainly identify him as the Anointed One. That's what Messiah means, by the way, Anointed One. That's what Christ means, Anointed One. So when John witnessed these signs, he knew for certain who the Anointed One was because he saw him being anointed by the Holy Spirit.

That's the nature of his prophetic ministry thereafter then, pointing people to Jesus as the Christ. That's what happened immediately after this scene after he records the baptism scene, then John says this in John Chapter 1, look at verse 35, "The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples." Two of John's closest disciples. They seem to have been absent from the scene, right? So two of his disciples are there. "He looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!' And those two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." If they had been there to see it themselves, they wouldn't have needed the pointer.

So John directed them to him. They left John to follow Jesus. They turned away from that ministry of John the Baptist, which had served its purpose, and they followed Jesus Christ. No hint of jealousy of his cousin here at all. No sense of rivalry. This is exactly why John came, to prepare people for Christ, to point people to Christ. Is that instructive for us as Christians or not? Is that not the highest calling of our life, to point people to Jesus Christ? It doesn't matter if they don't listen to us. Who am I? Who are you? Who are we? We're nothing. We're just signs. We're just fingers pointing to Christ. Let us be accurate in how we point, but let us point to Christ. He's the

one that's going to answer all objections. He's the one who's going to answer all arguments, he's going to silence every mouth. If not here, there. Jesus is the one we need to point people to, just like John. Just like John did.

Jesus came to be baptized so his identity could be revealed to John. That is the immediate purpose of Jesus' baptism. But what motivated Jesus to come forward for baptism? Why was he compelled to come forward? Certainly not out of a guilty conscience. You can turn back to Luke 3 now. Jesus knew he wasn't sinful. Jesus knew he had nothing of which he needed to repent, or for which he needed to repent, so what caused him to come? What compelled him? You might be tempted to think of Jesus as many people do, and many of the gnostic gospels that have been written about Jesus. They have some type of a mystical view about Jesus as a little kid. We talked about this when we went through Jesus' boyhood when he was 12 years old at the temple. Remember those gnostic gospels that described Jesus as like creating little birds out of mud and then sending them to fly away, and then some kid who told on him, who ratted him out. He kills him and then he raises him from the dead because he feels bad. Do you remember all that nonsense?

We talked about that and some people with that view in mind, that temptation to think of Jesus as always having these kind of magic powers and stuff like that. They tend to think of Jesus as always kind of hearing from God all his life. They imagine God speaking to Jesus in some sort of a private revelation, private Father-Son thing going on. We have no record of that, at all, happening prior to his baptism that we know of. The voice from heaven at his baptism, that was the first time that Jesus as a human being heard the voice of God the Father; first time.

You may remember how we talked about this, right? So there is no magic wand hitting Jesus on the head and all of a sudden, he's got these magical powers. No. No supernatural experience during childhood recorded. How did Jesus know what he knew? He studied Scripture. Remember, we talked about that? Just the study of Scripture was enough for Jesus to discern who he was, who God was, that God was truly his Father, that he is the Messiah. He learned this by the study of God's Word, what was revealed in the Old Testament, unobstructed by the scales of sin over his eyes, unhindered by the blindness of sin, unaffected in his mind by the, what we call the noetic effects of sin. None of that affected him.

He had a perfect mind. So as he studied Scripture, he knew. Jesus discerned who he was by studying the revealed Word of God. As we studied from Jesus' childhood, his experience at the temple, Jesus had come to the Messianic self-understanding by the time he was a 12-year-old boy, and rather than rushing off into ministry, remember, we talked about this, it says in Luke 2:51, "Jesus went down with his parents." He went with them back to Nazareth. He was submissive to them. It says in Luke 3:23 he was about 30 years old at his baptism, so that means he's been sitting quietly in Nazareth, tucked away with a knowledge of who he really is for 18 years.

Eighteen years he is living with this Messianic knowledge, that God had intended him for this. That's called patience, folks. Anytime you think you've got to wait a long time for something, put yourself in that mindset and say, okay, I can wait. That's true submission. Not just to his parents, but to his father's will, his father's timing. Jesus practiced patience, waiting for God's perfect timing, not his own. He continued to study during all of those 18 years. He continued growing in his understanding of what would usher in the Messiah's ministry, what would reveal the Messiah to Israel, and you all know what it is, don't you, because we've studied that.

It was John's ministry of preparation, Luke 3:2-4, "The word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. John went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness; "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."'" Jesus was drawn to John because he knew it was time. It's time. The time had come for his ministry to commence. He knew that once he visited John, it's on. Everything is going to happen with pace.

That, indeed, is what happened. After the baptism, Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days, undergoing temptation by the devil. When he returned, he was doing the will of his Father, he's executing the will of his father and that would eventually, as it went by pace, take him to the cross. So leaving home to see John, Jesus knew he's not gonna be back. He's not gonna be in the same role. He's not gonna be in the same relationship to his family. Still, eventually, as it finally happened, Jesus was compelled by this Messianic self-understanding. He knew his time had come, and Jesus went to see John.



So he went to see John, but then we might ask, well why did he submit to John's baptism? Again, we've mentioned this over and over, he's the only non-sinful human being who has ever lived. And John recognizes that. So why did Jesus here tell John, Matthew 3:15, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." What is the righteousness that they are fulfilling together? John was calling Israel to be baptized. And John was a bona fide prophet of God, right? To disobey a prophet of God was to disobey God himself.

To obey God's prophet was to obey God, right? Over in Matthew 21, there's a time when Jesus entered the temple, as he did, he taught there and he was hounded by the chief priests and the elders of the people, like he typically was, and they came up to him as he was teaching there in public. And once again, they're trying to reign him in, they're trying to put him under their thumb. They're trying to subdue him under their authority, ultimately hoping to silence him completely. They called Jesus to account on that occasion, Matthew 21, demanding to know his answer to this question, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Fascinating. They're talking his miracles. By what authority are you doing? Hey, you've got to answer to us. I'm sorry, what, what miracle have you

done, lately? Have you done anything? Why should I listen to you?

Anyway, Jesus answers them not with shutting down their argument. He doesn't flex his arm and turn them into birds and they all fly away. Whatever. He doesn't do any of that. He answers them with such shrewdness, such wisdom, discerning their motives. He said in Matthew 21:24-25, I'm gonna ask you a question, and if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from man? Oh, now they're caught. "They discussed it among themselves." These are the chief priests, right? These are the studied men, the elders of the people, bright guys. "They discussed among themselves, saying," well, 'If we say, from heaven, he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "From man," we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.'"

They didn't believe John was a prophet. They knew the people did, but they didn't. They just acknowledged the rest of the people did, to maintain positions of power and influence and to keep the money rolling in, they didn't want to offend what they judged to be the ignorant opinion of the masses. Let the

masses have their opinions. We understand. The religious establishment here is not about to admit that John was a prophet of God, not about to admit that his baptism was given by God, ordained by God, given from heaven. To do so would have required a virtue that they were without. It's called humility. They would have had to admit that they got it wrong, because they refused to go out and see John, to be baptized.

So here's the point: For Jesus to even ask that question, he had to have judged himself already that John was a true prophet of God, that his baptism was sent from heaven, required by God. Sinless or not, Jesus wanted to obey God. He wanted to obey the requirement of God, so he was eager to be baptized by John, a true prophet; submit to this ritual of preparation for the ministry of Messiah even though that he knew that he himself was the Messiah, even though he knew he himself was without sin. John's ministry called all of Israel to submit to this baptism of repentance. It caused Jesus to come out of the woodwork, quite literally, right? To emerge from the carpenter's shop and enter the waters of the Jordan River.

So now we understand the vital necessity that Jesus' baptism had in John's ministry. It's what he needed to identify the Messiah for Israel, to point others to Christ. If Jesus did

not come forward, John's ministry would have gone unfulfilled. We also understand the reason Jesus came forward. He came most simply in obedience to a prophet. He just wanted to obey God. Very simple. Obey God. God's calling all Israel to be baptized. I'm coming forward. I love God, I want to obey. But also, by reading Scripture, Isaiah 40, Malachi 3, Malachi 4, Jesus knew that John's ministry signaled that the time had come for his own ministry to commence. Here's the forerunner, the forerunner of my ministry.

In addition to all of that, personal obedience and the anticipation of his ministry commencement, I believe that Jesus discerned the deep theological significance of his baptism as well. I really do. Jesus knew what his baptism represented in the wider scope of redemptive history. You remember earlier when I read about John's hesitancy to baptize Jesus in Matthew 3:14, John tried to prevent Jesus' baptism, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus gently overcame those objections, you remember, telling him there was a deeper significance than he knew, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." It's fitting, it's appropriate. This is what we need to do.

Earlier in the service we read from Isaiah 53, that monumental prophetic chapter written about 700 years before Jesus was born. Jesus, he had read Isaiah as well. He read it in the original Hebrew. He knew that the Messiah was sent to be a substitute sacrifice for the sins of his people. Isaiah 53:4, "Surely he has borne our griefs and our sorrows he carried." Isaiah 53:5, "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." In the same way that Jesus had read Scriptures that prophesied things like his lineage, recorded like we're going to see, Luke 3:23 to 38, in the same way that Jesus read about that, knew where he came from, who he was, he knew his Davidic descent. He knew the precise location of his birth. He knew all of the prophecies and the providential outworking that lead to him and who he was, where he was born, his Messianic call. All of those prophecies that pointed to himself, which he believed since he was 12 years old.

Just as Jesus read about his Messianic role, he also read about his mission to die. His mission to die for the sins of his people, for those who believed in him, those for whom Christ died, not only will God reckon them guiltless, not only will God reckon them free from all sin, and free, by the way, from all

punishment for sin; he will also count them righteous in Christ. Just as God will impute, just as God will reckon the sins of the sinner to Christ and punish Christ for those sins, so also God will impute the perfect obedience of Christ to those sinners. And that's why Isaiah 53 closes in verses 11-12 with these words, "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant," get this, "make many to be accounted righteous." He'll account them righteous, he'll reckon them righteous, "He shall bear their iniquities. 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," he, "was numbered with the transgressors," he didn't belong with the transgressors, but he was numbered with them, he was reckoned with him, "yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

All that to say, when Jesus entered the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized by his cousin John, he knew that that faithful act of obedience to the prophetic word, that that and every other faithful act of obedience, would be transferred to his people. Reckoned to them, imputed to all those who believe. Jesus knew that his righteous life would be reckoned to the account of those for whom he died, those who would trust

him, those who would follow him to eternal life. This is the very truth that Paul summarized in 2 Corinthians 5:21, That “for our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin.” who knew no sin? Jesus Christ. “God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

It doesn't matter what culture, what ethnicity, what background, what kind of sinner you are, from the greatest to the least, righteousness of God, that's how God reckons you. That's the blessed exchange promised in the Gospel. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, but counting those sins against Christ. And he punished his son instead of us and gave us the gift of his perfect righteous life. That's why Jesus assured John, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill,” not most righteousness, “all righteousness,” All. Jesus identified with sinners that day in baptism. He entered those waters as a symbol of his intention to represent his people to God, to take their sins upon himself.

Just as the first Adam failed to represent humanity in righteousness, fulfilling righteousness; he failed. He shortcutted his ability to fulfill righteousness. Why? Because he sinned against God. Jesus, on the other hand, the last Adam,

he fulfilled all righteousness from the very beginning of his life to the very end. Romans 5:19, "For as by the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made," what? "Righteous." Right? That's why God declared his approval on his Son. From the very beginning, "You are my beloved Son; with you I'm well pleased."