

Jesus Is the Beloved Son
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June 27, 2010

Go ahead and turn to Matthew, chapter 3, 'cause that's where we're gonna be today. As you're turning there just a brief word of explanation in case you've been away for a little bit on vacation or that sort of thing. What we are doing is, over the course of this summer, we are taking time to look at different aspects of who Jesus is. We are looking at Him from different perspectives the Scripture gives us. In particular, we are basing the series out of Colossians chapter 1, where Paul bursts into praise for who Jesus is. He says 'Jesus is this', 'He's that', 'this is His nature, that's what He's done', and he kind of unpacks some of that. And so what we're doing is every Sunday we're taking a different focus, a different emphasis, and spending some time looking at that particular aspect.

Two weeks ago we looked at the reality that Jesus is the creator and sustainer, period. He is God. Last week we looked at the reality that Jesus is God made flesh. He is man. He is 100% God, 100% man, in one...one person, second member of the Trinity. And we looked at some of the significance of that. This week we are going to be looking at something that kind of flows out of that. Again, it hits on that relationship within the Trinity. But Jesus is the beloved Son. Colossians 1: 13-14 says that "*He,*" speaking of God

...has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In many ways you could almost take that...that is basically what we're gonna be talking about right here for the next thirty minutes or so, whatever. But go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 3, and we're going to be reading the last few verses here, 13 through 17. To give you an idea of what's going on prior to this, there is a man by the name of John. He is baptizing people, and he is preaching, he is prophesying. And what he is telling people is 'Get ready, be prepared, because the Messiah is coming.' Ok? So that's his proclamation. And so he is calling people to repent of their sins, prepare their hearts for the Messiah, and to be baptized as an identification with the Messiah who is to come. Ok? So that's the basic thing that's going on. And in verse 13 it says that

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan [the river] to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 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; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Now I'll just point something out here just real quick before we get into this, and it's the reality that this is one of two cases in the Gospels, two times that are recorded in the Gospels, the only two times that God the Father speaks and is heard by people around. Jesus talks to Him and prays on a regular basis throughout the Gospels, but this is one of only two instances. At the very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, when He is baptized, the Father says, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" The second time that it occurs is shortly before the crucifixion, at the end of Jesus' ministry, where the Father...it's on the Mount of Transfiguration; Peter, James, John, they see Jesus' full glory and Peter starts doing his 'Peter thing' and talking, putting his foot in his mouth...and basically the Father says, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.*" He's like, 'Peter, stop talking. This is My beloved...just listen to what He says...He will tell you about Me and tell you what's right.' He says, "*Listen to Him*", ok? So this is one of two instances. "*This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*"

This passage used to really confuse me. It really did. If you read through it, it was something that I was like, 'What is going on here?' Ok? It really used to confuse me...until there was a pastor at the church where I was at in North Carolina. He was preaching through, and he helped me see that this is why, ok, this is what's going on. And what confused me was this—why in the world would Jesus get baptized? Why would Jesus get baptized? If you look at it, in verse 11, shortly before we...where we read, John identifies 'This is John saying "I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who comes after me will baptize..."' He is baptizing a baptism of repentance, which implies sin is involved, right? Now likewise, in verse 14 and 15, Jesus comes and John says, 'Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa...wait a second! I need to be baptized by You. I shouldn't be baptizing You; I need You to baptize me.' And Jesus says,

'Whoa, cool the jets. Baptize me, ok? Because it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' What in the world is going on here? Because Scripture is very, very clear...let me just clarify this. Scripture is very clear that Jesus was absolutely, 100%, completely sinless. He is God. He did not sin. So what is going on? Anybody else share any sort of confusion here with what might be going on here? Ok.

Well, here's the...I'm going to try and unpack this a little bit and show you kinda what's going on. (I tell you what...these cords are gonna trip me. You guys will get a good laugh the day I go ahead and trip and land on my face.) But so what we're going to look at here is what did Jesus...what is He doing? Ok? What we end up seeing...I have to kind of explain to you something. Matthew is a Jewish man. He wrote the gospel of Matthew, the gospel according to Matthew. He is a Jewish man completely immersed in Jewish tradition, religion, thought, Scripture...he is completely immersed. He is also primarily writing to Jewish people of the first century, to people who were completely immersed in that same knowledge and understanding. And so it's interesting as Matthew unfolds, Matthew is making it clear that Jesus is retracing the steps of the nation of Israel. Ok? Jesus is retracing the steps of the nation of Israel. Matthew chapter 1...it opens up with the genealogy of Jesus, which traces all the way back to Abraham, calling to mind the foundation, the birth of the nation. And it tracks all the way through up to Jesus, which recalls the whole history of the nation of Israel. Jesus' family are warned by God that basically they face annihilation if they stay where they are at. And so, in order to avoid dying, they flee to Egypt in the same way that Jacob's family in the days of famine fled to Egypt, where they could be taken care of by God's provision through their son, Joseph, so that they would not die. Ok?

Likewise, God then brought His people of Israel up out of Egypt to deliverance when it was time, when it was safe for them to return to the Promised Land. In the same way, through Matthew 2, Jesus' family comes back through from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people of Israel...they were baptized, so-to-speak, as a nation through the Red Sea as God parted the waters; and they passed through the waters to freedom and to their birth as a nation, instituting that. Jesus, in the same way, passes through the water of baptism as he begins His ministry. He then goes into the wilderness for forty days; the people of Israel go into the wilderness for forty years. Ok? While they are there they end up facing a number of temptations and everything. And basically, the essence of what they struggled with time in, time out, is pretty much God's provision, God's protection, those sorts of things, His ability to provide and protect them, and to lead them. And His plan...is it really the best plan? Those are the three temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness. They failed, He succeeded. You look at it, and then He comes back from the wilderness, and what ends up happening is He goes and the very next thing that happens is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus goes up on a mountain and proclaims and unfolds and explains God's law to the people who would be God's people. Likewise, the people of Israel had a time where they were sitting at the foot of Mt. Sinai, receiving God's law and His desire for them, those people who would be His people.

Matthew is setting up this parallel structure that will...where it's basically setting up this right here, ok? It's setting up a substitution. That is what is going on. Jesus is preparing to substitute Himself for the people He will save. It's not His sins that He has to worry about repenting of. It's not His sins that He has to fulfill all righteousness for. It's ours. It's the sins of the nation of Israel, the people who would be God's people...it's the sins of the people who would come after, who are to be forgiven through Him, through His substitutionary sacrifice. In first century Jewish thought, a substitutionary sacrifice is completely understandable. You sacrifice one being for the sins of another being. And because of that sacrifice...you've heard the term 'scapegoat'? That's where it comes from, ok, is that your sins are laid on them and they pay the consequence for your sin. That is what is being set up here, is Jesus is the scapegoat. He is willingly stepping into our sin, our identity, and setting it up to pay the price for our sin. That's what's going on even at the baptism. Ok? He is preparing the way, preparing it for us. He fulfills our righteousness for us and we trade identities with Him. When He is being baptized that is His public identification; and it's interesting, it is recorded in all four gospels. This is one of the few things that is recorded in all four gospels of Jesus' ministry. He is identifying Himself with us, those who would come after Him and place trust in His substitutionary sacrifice. He is setting up a substitution.

Now as I go through this, this is just kind of an aside and I'll try and blow through this real quickly, but I can't go through here and hit on the significance of this without following up and taking just a few moments to talk about baptism, ok? Because that's what Jesus' substitution...He is identifying Himself with sinners while He is being baptized. Jesus then turns around, and it's interesting one of the last things that He does, one of the last commands He gives, is to "Go therefore...", making disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. And you look throughout Acts and following the early church; typically one of the very first steps of obedience that a follower of Christ does is to likewise identify themselves with Him. He identified Himself with us through that ordinance of baptism; likewise, that's the significance of baptism is you are publicly declaring that you

are making your own choice, that you are identifying yourself with Him. In the same way that, like with the scapegoat you would lay your hands on that scapegoat and you would proclaim your sins, and it was this idea that you are publicly declaring that 'My sin is being transferred here.' It's a physical representation of a spiritual reality of substitution that is going on. That's the significance of baptism, ok? And it's something that Jesus instituted at the very beginning of His ministry, and He, Himself, went through it to identify with us.

Now here's the thing. I'll go ahead and I'll just hit this up real quick because basically there's three general reasons that I find that followers of Christ have not yet been baptized if they haven't. One...they're recent believers and they haven't had an opportunity to. In which case, I will tell you that if that is you (where is it? I think I've got...maybe I don't...Oh, I do! A bulletin...) Inside our bulletin there's this really cool thing. It's an announcement about halfway down the first page inside. We are going to be doing baptisms for anyone who is interested on July eleventh. That's two weeks from now. There's an opportunity for ya. Ok? The second reason that people sometimes don't is they've just been ignorant of the significance of baptism. They don't understand the significance that Christ was baptized because He was identifying with us, and He asks us to likewise identify with Him through a public proclamation of faith which typically, through Scripture, ties in with baptism. Ok?

There's a third reason, typically, that people...I've encountered different believers look at and they don't want...it's basically they don't want...they've had time but they haven't been willing to. They may understand the significance, but they aren't willing to...and here...so I'm just going to run through a couple of quick reasons that...excuses that people have given me, who have been believers for a long time. Ok? And so here's...I have to hit on it, ok? Because it's...here we go, Jesus is saying this is an important thing, He's setting up substitution. One...first one. "I was baptized as an infant. I don't need to be baptized again." Hear me in this, ok? Because I know there are people in here who this applies to. I am not at all tearing down or denigrating your faith, the faith of your parents, or your spiritual heritage. I am not. What I would say is praise the Lord! You were raised in a family of people who had faith in God, and chose to express their faith that they were claiming on your behalf as you were a child. But the simple reality is, in the same way that your parents can't make a decision to follow Christ on your behalf—it's a personal decision that you have to make—Jesus Christ asks us and expects us to personally make a decision to identify with Him, when we choose to follow Him, as a follower of Christ. Ok? It's not a matter of...if anything, praise the Lord, that should be a verification of your parents' faith that they had when you were a child; that here, praise the Lord, that you have made a personal decision for yourself, and it's now not you're riding on their faith and just coming up in their heritage, but now you are affirming it and you are saying "yes, this is something I own and I identify with Christ."

Second, second thing I've run into. "It's just a ritual, it's just something, you know, it's some meaningless..." First of all, Jesus apparently felt that it was important enough that He went through it to identify with us; and it was the last command that He gave, or implied, involved in the last command that He gave. So I don't think it's a pointless ritual. Interestingly, the people that I've...whom I've spoken with...with whom I've spoken about this in the past, and who've gone this route...typically they don't make the same argument about marriage just being a pointless ritual, or you know, other things like that. "Well, it's just a stupid piece of paper. It doesn't mean anything." Yes, it does. In the same way, why is it that our Lord and Savior felt it was important? It's probably not just a pointless ritual.

"I don't agree with your church. I don't want to identify myself with your church or this other church." That's fine. Guess what? Baptism is not you identifying yourself with Wasilla Bible Church or any other particular church. Baptism is you identifying yourself with Jesus, the One who identified Himself with you. This sort of argument would be like my children when, if one of them is in trouble, there are some times where real quickly, they know that they're in trouble or they have a command that they haven't lived up to, and they start pointing the finger at their sibling. "Well wait a second, he..." "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa...I'm not saying that your sibling is right. Ok? I'm not saying that your brother or your sister is right. I'm not saying they're wrong. They have nothing to do with what you and me are talking about right here, and what I am expecting of you. Don't try and shift my focus elsewhere." In the same way, this is about you and Jesus, and who is identifying themselves with whom.

And now here's "Well, but it's humiliating!" Or, "I'll have to...I've been in church, I've been a believer for years, I'm a grown man", whatever it is, "I'm scared of the water," "I'm scared of what people will think," "I don't like being up in front of people," whatever. Jesus...let's put it...look at John's reaction. He's like, 'What are you doing? I should be baptized by...why are You getting baptized?!? What in the world are You...?' Don't you think that it might...there were plenty...it says that multitudes were coming to watch people being baptized and listen to John. I think Jesus had an audience as He was being baptized, ok? If He can get over it, probably you as a follower of Christ can get over it. He also faced the cross. You're scared of the water? I understand. Ok? I understand. But here's the thing...Jesus faced the cross, and He was so not looking forward to it that He began to sweat drops of blood as his

body was under the physical, emotional, mental stress of what awaited Him. And still yet, He went through it because that was what His Father, whom He was following, expected Him to do. Likewise, if our Lord and Savior says, 'Listen, I know you're scared, but this is what I desire for you to do to identify yourself with Me,' what right do we have to go ahead and say 'Yeah, but this is a little tougher than what you've been through.'

Ok, I'll stop there, because hopefully I've addressed any...well, wait a second. One or two others. "Well, I don't have anything with me..." Ok, here's the thing. You have two weeks to plan for it. We have a baptism in two... "That date doesn't work for me!" Here's...I love this. Jim, he pulled this announcement together. It says "Our first scheduled baptism will be Sunday, July 11th at 3:00 pm. Other dates are available upon request." Basically, if this date and time doesn't work for you, guess what? You wanna be baptized, we will figure out a way to give you the opportunity to identify yourself with Christ through baptism. Ok, problem solved.

Now here's the thing. I will make one quick disclaimer, ok, one quick disclaimer. If you are a child in here, you are living in your parents' house, and they do not desire for you to get baptized at this point in time, you honor and obey your parents. Ultimately what it comes down to is that is something that they will be responsible for, figuring out and determining what is ok and what is right for you between them and God and how they raise you. You honor and obey your parents. This is a decision that you can make at some point when you come out...this does not determine whether or not you are saved. But it is important enough that Jesus made a focus of starting His ministry that way. And so I would encourage you...honor your parents if they do not desire for you to follow this path. As long as you are in their household you honor and obey and respect them, and God will be pleased with that. Ok? When you are out on your own you can choose to make this decision, if that is a decision that you still desire to make. Ok?

So, but we've gotta get goin', because basically the whole point is that Jesus is substituting Himself; He is setting up a substitution where He is baptized, He is identifying Himself with us, setting up the Gospel. Ok? So we're gonna flip over here in Ephesians chapter 1 and look at the implication of this. Ephesians chapter 1. Gonna read verses 3 through 7. It says

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the richness of His grace...

Gonna point out just two quick things here. One...God chose us for His glory. God chose us for His glory. God didn't choose us, or accept us, because somehow we were good enough. We were completely unlovely, completely unworthy. I am...I am a sinner by nature, and the only reason I am able to stand here is by the good grace of God. The only reason I can approach God's throne of grace, Hebrews 4, with confidence is because I am held blameless before our God and Father, before the judgment seat of His throne, because of the blood of Jesus Christ that has washed me clean. It's not because of any effort, anything that I have done to earn it; it's not because of my own value; it's not because of anything good I've done. It's because of His graciousness. And He didn't even do it because He needed me. He is completely self-sufficient. He doesn't gain anything by saving me except for the fact that it just further points out how gracious, how beautiful, how merciful, how good He is that He would show mercy and grace to a sinner like me, like you. And He did it for His glory, because by saving someone like me it just further shows how gracious and loving and merciful He is. And He receives grace and praise because of it. That's the whole reason He chose to save men. Now here's the thing...yes, so I can have life, so I can experience a relationship in His presence. Those are side benefits. Those are very real rewards that come from it. But that is not the point. It makes it very clear—He chose us, He predestined us according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace. The reason He saved me, a sinner, is because it only further shows how gracious He is so that He might be praised. Praise Him! Praise Him! Praise Him! That's why He desires to save you, to reach out to you, to seek after you.

Here's the other thing. You look at this, and we are also adopted through the blood of Jesus. That is the other thing I point out here. It says "In Him," speaking of Jesus,

He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.

He has blessed us in the Beloved. All of the blessings, all of the acceptance, everything that we receive is because we've been adopted in Jesus Christ, bathed in His blood. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, the forgiveness of our sin. This is a radical thought, that if you work this into your heart I am absolutely convinced it will change your life and the way you look at the world. You do not deserve any good thing from God, and neither do I. But because of His grace He has chosen to adopt us as children, as His children. You are...if you have never been adopted by the Father, if you have not placed your identity and placed your entire trust for the forgiveness of your sins in the blood of Jesus Christ, His substitutionary sacrifice where He desires to identify Himself with you, then you are not a child of God. You are dead. Paul makes this very clear as he continues to develop it through Ephesians and Ephesians chapter 2. You are dead in your sins. You are floating face down, dead in your sin. And Jesus, in His glorious grace, came down into a sinful world and dove into the nasty, sinful existence of our lives and breathed new life into us, and allowed us to be raised up with Him and seated in the heavenly places because of His substitutionary sacrifice.

This is a radical concept. Think about this for a second. If you have a child...if you had a child and someone brutally, knowingly, intentionally, because of their hate for you, tortured your child and did horrible things to your child to the point of death, what kind of person comes around and says, 'You know what? I love you so much, and My child willingly went through that in substitution for you. And so, because of My child's death at your hands, I'm going to adopt you as My own.' That is completely audacious. That is a radical claim. That is nowhere anywhere else in all of religion, in any other claims, that the God and creator of the universe would allow His child to be brutally killed and tortured so that He could be a substitutionary sacrifice for the very people who will kill Him, and then turn around and adopt those killers, those rebels, those people who spit in the creator of the universe's face and say, 'I don't want You to run my life'...He will adopt them.

Quick point of application here to, as far as how this plays out. James 1 and 2, especially at the tail end of James 1 and the first half of James 2, indicates that the extent to which we understand our true identity in the family of God as adopted children will be directly reflected in how we deal with, our heart for, how we provide for and care for orphans and widows, the very people who represent us apart from God. In the same way that God reached out and had compassion on us, how do we have compassion on widows and orphans? I think it's probably one of the most sad and heartbreaking realities of communities around the nation, around the world at times, if there is a community where there are orphans and widows who are left on their own to try and figure out some way to take care of themselves, when we have a people of God who were brought into God's family as adoption when we didn't do anything to deserve it, we don't deserve any good thing, we didn't do anything to provide but we couldn't, and still yet in His good grace He reached out to us and adopted us into His family. James 1 and 2 really ties those things together...your understanding of your real standing before God and how that will be reflected in the way that you live our life. Food for thought.

What we're going to do is we're going to wrap up here. What now? Well, if you're not a follower of Christ, basically what it comes down to is this—you, too, can be adopted. You don't deserve any good thing. You don't. This is both the horror and the beauty of biblical Christianity. You cannot nor will you ever be able to earn God's favor. You are completely unlovely. There is no reason why He should bring you into His family. He...in fact, you are guilty of the death of His Son. And still, yet, in His grace, in His goodness, because of His Son's substitutionary sacrifice that He was setting up through His earthly ministry with His life, His death, His resurrection...because of that you are able to be adopted into His family. That is both the horror and the beauty of the Gospel. You will never merit God's favor, but God could not love you more than He already does. And He makes your acceptance possible through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. You placing trust that that substitution, that sacrifice, 'was enough for all the debt that I owe, and because of that You will accept me, and so I am Yours. You are my Father, and I will follow You. My life is Yours. Your Son bought My life with His.'

There's a second thing here if we're followers of Christ, those of you who are followers of Christ. If you're struggling...here are times of life where storms of life hit you hard. Ok? Matthew 7 at the tail end talks about the storm. You know, 'the rain fell down, the floods came up', yeah. The whole story of that...or the whole reason for that story is this idea, this truth, that your ability to weather the storms of life...and I've encountered, I've been in this position before, I expect that I will be again at some point in my life...where life hits you so hard that you have nothing left to hold onto other than your identity in Christ. If He is not the foundation, if He is not the bedrock, if He is not where you are firmly rooted and founded...in His evaluation of you, in His assessment of you, of your identity in Him...then life will wipe you out. The beautiful thing is...in the same way, and this is again why this baptism is a beautiful picture of the Gospel...is because Jesus, in the same way that when He was baptized and He was identifying Himself with us, He was baptized which is a picture of being laid in the grave and brought up anew to new life...when that happened the Father said, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" And Jesus

was identifying Himself with you if you are a follower of Christ. And so because of that, because of the reality that God the Father looked at Jesus and said, *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,"* because of that, in the same way...Hebrews 4 talks about the throne of grace...because of that we are able to stand before the throne of God's grace absolutely confident in the reality that "I am God's beloved son in whom He is well pleased." Not because of anything I've done, but because of everything Jesus has done. He identified Himself with me, He took my place, He substituted. And now in the same way...that's what I was proclaiming when I was baptized. I identified myself with Him, and in the same way my sins have been washed clean. I'm not sinless, but I am blameless. And now the Father looks at me and says, 'This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased.' Not because I deserve it, but because of Christ.

It's interesting, the things that Jesus faced in the temptation, Matthew 4, following the baptism. They...I think it's very key that the two times that the Father said, *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,"* they come immediately before the two most trying experiences and circumstances of Jesus' earthly life. It's like right before He goes into the wilderness and He is tempted by Satan, himself, He is affirmed by the Father, saying "This is My beloved Son," and the same thing before He goes to the cross. It's interesting. Satan, he knows exactly who Jesus is. But you look at the temptation, and I won't go here...this could be a whole other sermon; we won't go there, I promise. But you look at it this way. The first couple of temptations Satan starts off "If You are the Son of God..." "If You really are the Son of God..." Does Satan not know who Jesus is? But...and then he goes and he calls into question God's...Jesus' identity as the Son, as a child of God, as the beloved Son. He calls into question His identity based upon God's provision for Him, and based upon God's protection of Him. And then he goes on and he calls into question the wisdom of God's plans in the third temptation. 'Are You really going to trust that He has Your best interests in mind?' Every time, Jesus' response is basically to go back and to say, 'Listen, I will place my identity, I will trust in His word, in His proclamation. And I will not put Him to the test, and I will not bow my knee to follow anyone else. I will follow the Father's will.' He goes back to His identity as a beloved Son.

In the same way, when you...when life hits you hard you are probably going to be tempted to ask 'If God really loves me, I really am God's child, why would He let this happen? If I really am God's child why wouldn't He provide better for me? If I really am God's child then why would He have this planned for my life?' And what I would encourage you to do is do the same thing that Jesus did, and go back to your identity as a beloved child of God. And you claim that, and you hold on to that and nothing else.

[Congregation sings the prayer for witness song.]

Go in the confidence of His truth and grace. Thank you.