

The Covenantal Divide: The Baptism of Jesus

Luke 3:21-22

May 15, 2016

These are monumentally important verses. These two verses here really represent a high point in redemptive history. This is a zenith that marks the division between the two covenants of the Bible, very, very important text. This is what you might call a watershed text. I'm calling these two verses, Luke 3:21 to 22, the covenantal Divide. The covenantal divide. And for this week, we're going to consider the role of Jesus' baptism in that divide, and next week we're going to look at his anointing. But the two events happened at the same moment, the same point in time at this covenantal divide.

I mentioned the mountains, and you guys know not far from where we live, just drive a little ways into the Rocky Mountains and you are going to come to the Continental Divide. Continental divide. That's what is known as a watershed, right? It's a

hydrological divide. The prominent peaks of our Rocky Mountains separate the water that falls from the sky, sending some of it east and some of it west. Basically, and I know this is a bit of an oversimplification here, but basically whatever precipitation falls on the west side of the Continental Divide, when that snow melts and the water runs into the rivers, those river systems on the west side of the Continental Divide carry that water eventually to the Pacific Ocean, right? Or Baja, California, but basically to the Pacific Ocean. And any precipitation that falls on the east side of the Continental Divide, those river systems carry the water to the east. So, you've got the Hudson Bay in the north, but it's east, also the Atlantic Ocean and also the Gulf of Mexico in the southeast. So these beloved Rocky Mountains of ours are a very, very significant feature distributing God's bounty, his provision of water to the entire continent.

That's what we're seeing in this text. Not a continental divide, but something far more profound, something far more glorious. We're looking at a covenantal divide. These verses, Luke 3:21-22, they mark the end of the Old Covenant and the beginning of the New Covenant. We're probably more used to, because we have bibles in front of us, we're probably more used

to the term testament, right? Old Testament, New Testament. This text marks the divide between the Testaments. On the one side is the testimony of the prophets of Old represented by John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Covenant. And then on the other side is the testimony of the New Testament, represented first and foremost by Jesus, known popularly, according to Luke 24:19, as "Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."

Jesus Christ is not just a single peak towering over the text; rather, the truths of his life and his ministry, his person and his work, those truths are like an entire range of staggeringly high mountain peaks forming a covenantal divide. And even though he stands between the two covenants, he also at the same time, he stands not to divide them, but actually to join them, to connect the two covenants. Just as our Rocky Mountains and the Continental Divide, that they have joins east to west, so also Jesus Christ joins the Old to the New. He is the continuity between the redemptive covenants of the Bible.

So with just that little bit of insight into the significance of this section, this Goliath of a text here that we have before us, let's take a look at those two verses together. Just read them; follow along as I read. "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.'"

Now, let me make just a few observations so that you can kind of see for yourself the structure of the text. Basically, verse 21 gives us the setting and the occasion of the scene. And then verse 22 tells us what actually happened. Pretty simple, but I want to look a bit closer here. The way Luke writes this for us in the Greek, it comes across this way. In verse 21 it starts out this way, "Now it happened." Now it happened. You can't see that in your English text if you have an ESV Bible, ESV translation. Our ESV translation leaves the Greek opening, "Now it happened," untranslated, and it's just to keep it smooth. But the NAS, the New American Standard, and the King James version Bibles, they're careful to convey the verb, It came about (NAS),

It came to pass, (King James Version). In verses 21-22, there is only one finite verb driving the action of the sentence and it's that verb, something happened. This thing happened, and the rest of the verb-sounding words, they're all there to support that opening verb, it happened.

As you can see, the setting and the occasion there described in just one verse, verse 21, that verse just sets up the scene. People were being baptized. Jesus was baptized, and while he was praying, bang! It happened. It's verse 22, that fills in the details, tells us exactly what happened. What happened? Heavens opened. The Spirit descended. A voice came. That is what happened. And that is where Luke is putting the stress grammatically. That is where he is putting the stress structurally. The emphasis is on that supernatural phenomenon.

Earthly circumstances, an occasion here, is all important. We're going to take the time to understand why they are important today. But the passage actually calls our attention to the opening of the heavens, the descending Holy Spirit, and the affirming proclamation of God the Father. That is what Luke

wants us to focus on. In fact, you'll notice, even though Jesus is here to be baptized, John isn't there interacting with him in the text. Luke closed the scene with John's ministry in the previous section. He doesn't want us to look at John anymore. He wants us to look at Christ.

Keep in mind what just happened. Look back at Luke's summary of the ministry of John the Baptist in verses 18-20. We covered those verses last week and, actually, we covered verses 15 through 20 last week, that's six verses. I just wanted to point that out. I can cover more than just one verse; figured you can allow me these two weeks on two verses just as a little bit of a reward, right, for doing so well last week.

But remember what has just happened in the text according to Luke's narrative here, verses 18 to 20. Look what he says there. "So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people." Remember, that's that term *euangelizo*. He preached the Gospel to the people, "But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the

evil things that Herod had done," he added this to them all, he locked up John in prison.

Remember we talked about that last week? Herod here represents the political establishment. He represents leadership. He represents, in fact, the category of all of those who prefer their sin, their lifestyles, their way of life, and they're willing to turn and reject the teaching of the biblical prophets like John the Baptist, like Jesus Christ, and ride on the heels of the rejection of Herod Antipas, the hostility of those who refuse to repent at the preaching of the truth. God steps in. He intervenes with what one commentator called "his own unimpeachable testimony." That's good. It's an unimpeachable testimony. What higher court are you going to go to and appeal to above God? None.

John came to prepare the way of the Lord by preaching the message of repentance. John came to identify the Christ, baptizing those who obeyed the prophetic word and then John came to point people to the Christ. But the political, the religious establishment, committed to their own sin, committed to their

own self-righteousness, they wholesale rejected John's ministry. So God opened the heavens to send a message. "You are my beloved Son." It doesn't matter what they say. "You are my beloved Son with you I am well pleased." No higher testimony can be found than that divine voice booming out of heaven. God intervened, cut into human time and space to testify, to affirm and to validate Christ, which looked back looked back to confirm not only John's word, but also the word that was spoken by Gabriel, by Zechariah and Elizabeth, by Mary, by the angelic host, by Simeon, by Anna. God stands with all of those who embrace this Gospel, which is about his beloved son with whom he is well pleased. Where to do you want to stand?

There is no justification whatsoever for rejecting Jesus Christ. He is the unimpeachable testimony about the truth of Christianity. I realize people can look at our lives and say, Hypocrite. You're inconsistent with what you claim to believe. Granted. Guilty. Look at Jesus Christ. Tell me if you can find a flaw. Not one. God knows all things. He affirmed Christ from the very start, and the more you study the person and the work of Jesus Christ, the more you'll come to see Jesus as God sees Jesus. But those who reject him, those who refuse to look

closely, those who refuse to love him, they will suffer for treating with indifference or with hatred the one whom God the Father sent and approved. Serious issue here, folks. God makes that clear from the very start by anointing Jesus at his baptism.

So we're going to focus on Jesus' baptism this week and then his anointing, that is an approval from God, anointing next week. And here's the little outline we're going to follow. There are three points that we're going to cover this week and next. The transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant involves a handoff from John's ministry as the forerunner, to Jesus' ministry as the Messiah. As Jesus said, all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. In fact, all the prophets and the law culminated in the ministry of John the Baptist because they all pointed to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

So first we're going to take time to understand the setting, the setting of this monumental event here, what happened here. This is the ministry of John the Baptist. That's going to take some time to consider as we look at the other

Gospel accounts and try to understand the significance of all this. And then, second, we're going to look at the occasion, which is the obedience of Jesus. I'll probably hint at some of that point by the end of our time this morning. And then finally, the response from heaven, which is the affirmation of God that we just read about.

Okay, so let's get right into that first point, the setting, the ministry of John. The ministry of John, we're going to spend the bulk of our time on this point. We need to understand the significance of John's baptism. We need to understand what happened that day, why John came to baptize. We need to understand why Jesus came to be baptized by John, what compelled him, why it was necessary, what it signified. Okay.

So let's understand first what actually happened. How did everything go down that day? There are a number of accounts in the Gospels that we read, and they seem to present it from different angles. So we want to see what happened. Look at verse 21 again. It says, "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying." This divine

phenomenon happened immediately after Jesus was baptized, while he was praying. It says there, "When all the people were baptized," and that might give you the impression that the scene was rather crowded, that Jesus was mixed in with a whole bunch of people getting into the Jordan River. It might give you a sense that it was thronged with people. It may be a bit chaotic. In that case, everyone, right? Everyone would have been there in the waters witnessing the heavens opening, the Spirit descending, and the voice coming out of the heaven, right? That's how it seemed.

Alfred Edersheim, you read his big thick book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, a fantastic writer from a Jewish perspective, thinking about all these details. He believes John's ministry happened during a sabbatical year. You know what a sabbatical year is, right? It's that once every seven years; it's that year that is important. According to Leviticus 25:1-7, that seventh year the land was to lie fallow. Remember that? It was kind of a rest from normal sowing and reaping. People were not to work the fields during that sabbatical year. The text says in Leviticus 25, "You are not to sow your field or prune your vineyard, you are not to reap what grows by itself from your

crop or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. It must be a year of complete rest for the land." Okay, that's the sabbatical year. Folks, that's way before it was cool to be green, right. During the previous six years, the people were to sow and prune, they were to harvest and gather, but the seventh year was for rest for the land, for themselves; it was for rest. People engaged during that year in other kinds of labor, but they were freed up from those normal cycles of plowing and sowing and reaping.

So Edersheim notes the impact that would have had on the numbers of people coming to witness John's ministry. "Released from business and agriculture," he says, "the multitude flocked around him as he passed on his mission. Rapidly, the tidings spread from town and village to distant homestead, still swelling the numbers that hastened the banks of the sacred river." End Quote. Interesting, isn't it, to think about how God times this so that the most people could get the most impact. Providentially, strategically, this was the perfect year to send the forerunner. Many people were coming, and when they returned home, they spread the word and that sent even more people out to see John. So, like I said, that might lead us to believe that

Jesus' baptism was crowded with throngs of people, all kinds of people.

There is actually, though, good evidence that this was more of a quiet scene, more of a tranquil scene, a little more serene. Luke has painted here a very, very careful, precise picture, grammatically, to clarify that point. Here's how verse 21 reads in the Greek. It says, "Now it happened when all the people were baptized, after Jesus was baptized, while he was praying the heavens opened," and so on. Luke's very precise, the tense of the verb that he uses in that first phrase, "when all the people were baptized," if he had used the present infinitive, he's wanting us to picture Jesus getting into the water with the rest of the people. But Luke didn't use the present infinitive; he used the aorist infinitive, which strongly implies, as A.B. Bruce says, quote, "that the bulk of the people had already been baptized before Jesus appeared on the scene. That is, that John's ministry was drawing to its close." End Quote.

So Luke wants us to see here the general time frame of Jesus' coming forward for baptism. It was during the time frame of John's ministry, actually more toward the end of that time, not during the throngs of people, but a little more toward the end. Jesus' baptism happened during a time of popular interest in John's ministry, but he's not necessarily getting into the water with a bunch of other people. You need to understand that Jesus and John, here, were relatively alone at this point as they come together into the waters of baptism. I don't know what kind of pictures you saw on the flannel graph in your Sunday School, but if it ruins your flannel graph memory, I'm so sorry, but I think that is what the text is teaching. During the waning months of John's public ministry that's when Jesus came forward for his own baptism.

It's interesting to note this that this has been the first time that John and Jesus had actually met. They were cousins, right? Luke 1:80, though, tells us that John was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance in Israel. We learned about that weeks ago. God prepared John away from the public eye, tucked away in the Judean wilderness. Jesus, though, on the other hand, he had grown up in Nazareth living a

relatively normal human life, submitting to his parents, supporting his mother, Mary, working in his father, Joseph's, carpenter shop. It's a relatively domesticated life.

It's interesting, though, that Luke doesn't put John here in these verses at all. He's making a distinction. Matthew and Mark put John and Jesus together. Luke doesn't include John here at all. Once he put the period on verse 20, Luke closed the chapter on John's ministry. John is locked away in prison. He's off the scene. Jesus takes center stage. The only interaction between these two prophets that's recorded in Luke's Gospel, it doesn't come until Chapter 7 and they actually communicate there through intermediaries. John sends his messengers to Jesus to verify everything is going according to plan. Jesus answers him.

So John's not even here, and yet they are in the water together, first time they meet. It's all because Luke's emphasis is different from Matthew's and Mark's. He wants us to focus on what happened in verse 22. So what happened in verse 22? Why don't we want to get caught up in John's ministry, which I'm forcing you to do today, get caught up in John's ministry. What

was going on? Why doesn't Luke want us to see that? Because he wants us to focus on and see the supernatural phenomenon; the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended, a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Mark, here, paints an even more vivid picture of this scene. He says that when the heavens were opened, he doesn't say it that way. Mark is so strong in his language. He says when Jesus came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open, ripped open. Luke's got a different emphasis, more theological. But you need to know that this is as dramatic as it can be. This is not just a, Oh, what a nice cloud formation. This is something being torn open. Torn open, you might even say it was not just sudden and immediate, but even violent.

Some people are tempted to think that this is simply a shared vision between John and Jesus, the two cousins standing there in the water, they're having some kind of subjective religious experience here. Luke's language, though, doesn't allow

us to see it that way at all. Next phrase says, "The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove." The word form there, it's the word *eidos*. We get the word idol from that word *eidos*. That is a physical representation of a deity. The form, the *eidos*, it refers to the shape, the structure of something as it appears to somebody else, the form the outward appearance. This is what other people perceive with their senses, but then it adds the adjective, bodily, *somatikos*. You hear the word, *soma*, body, in there. That refers to something being corporeal, as opposed to non-corporeal, that is to say there is a body here. There is something substantial, something objective; this corporeal bodily reality that descended from the open heavens was dove-like. Note the language there. Luke, again, is very precise. In fact, all of the Gospel writers say the same thing on this point, they don't say that the Holy Spirit, in the body of a dove, descended from heaven, they say it was dove-like.

First of all, the word dove, that's a word that is translated dove, but it can also be translated pigeon. For obvious reasons we like to picture the Spirit not as a pigeon, but as a dove. Hard for those Christian retailers to sell all their trinkets and holy hardware with pictures of pigeons on the

cups and all of that kind of stuff, so a dove it is. A dove it should be. But the word *peristera* can be a dove or a pigeon because both birds have the very same kind of descent. If you've ever observed those birds, like a pigeon or a dove, descending from flight to a stop, landing on a branch or on the ground, or wherever they land, they descend from their flight and come to a stop in the same matter, with a kind of fluttering. It's energetic. It's graceful, it's gentle, but it's also full of life, full of energy.

All the way back in Genesis 1:2 when the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth, it says, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." You remember that? Genesis 1:2. The Jewish commentators used to picture that verb translated as hovering like a brooding bird, hovering or fluttering over its young. So, for a Jewish man like John, this is the perfect way for God to represent the Holy Spirit to him, for the descent of this bodily form to be this physical bodily representation with his energetic fluttering as it comes to a rest on Jesus, the representation of the Holy Spirit. The commentator James Edwards writes, "Such concrete imagery underscores the objectivity of the event. The descent of

the Spirit on Jesus is not depicted as a metaphor of enlightenment or a mystical experience, but as an empirical reality.”

So the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended bodily, like a dove, like a pigeon, and a voice spoke from heaven. Audible voice, once again, a physical phenomenon setting sound waves in motion, which reach the auditory nerves of these two men at the waters of the Jordan River that day. That’s just to give you a picture of what happened on the scene, just to get a clear idea of how things went that day. Jesus and John in a private or semi-private setting, going into the water, being baptized, it’s in the context and the scope and the sphere of his massively popular well-known ministry, but it’s during a time when they’re kind of alone. Jesus goes down at the hands of John who’s baptizing him, he comes up, he’s praying. The heavens open, literally open. The Spirit, in the form of a dove, as it comes down, it’s looking like that fluttering, it’s looking like energy itself, coming down and resting on Jesus, and then God the Father speaks.

Before we get into the profound meaning of this heavenly affirmation, this divine phenomenon, the heaven has opened, the Spirit has descended, a voice has spoken, 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. His life was always and ever in full conformity to his father's will. What did he need to repent of? What sins did he have? What's he coming for? In fact, God the Father himself, as we just read, verse 22, God has put his imprimatur on Jesus, affirming from heaven, "With you I am well pleased." What is that if not an acknowledgment of sinless perfection?

As Jesus taught later, no one will enter heaven approved by God without perfect righteousness. And yet the heavens are open to him. He said in Matthew 5:20, "I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees" believe me, folks, they were fastidious about righteous performance, external acts. Unless your righteousness exceeds that in some way, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Later in the same chapter, verse 48, "You must therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Why, then, is a perfect man, a sinless man coming forward to be baptized by John? Even John the Baptist, the prophet who administered the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, the prophet who expected Jesus to come, even he questioned why Jesus was coming for baptism. Over in Matthew Chapter 3, verses 14 to 15, we read Matthew's account of the same scene. It says there, "John would have prevented him," from being baptized, "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.'"

So why did Jesus come? Why was Jesus' baptism necessary to fulfill all righteousness? It's significant that the divine pronouncement in Luke 3:22, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," it didn't come before Jesus was baptized, but after, immediately after he was baptized. And that shows us that there is some kind of connection between Jesus being baptized and the Father giving his seal of approval and sending the Holy

Spirit. So let's just start here with an immediate reason that God sent Jesus to John to be baptized. And then we're going to think about what compelled Jesus to come forward in his own thinking, why he came forward for baptism, what motivated him. Finally, we'll consider the theological significance of Jesus' baptism at the hands of John.

So to see the immediate reason here first off, turn over to the first chapter of John's Gospel, John chapter 1. 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.

So John knew that God sent him to baptize so that the Messiah would be revealed. Why, then, was John surprised when Jesus came forward to be baptized? Why did he try to prevent Jesus from being baptized if he expected Jesus to be baptized? Well, although John expected Jesus to come, although he expected Jesus to be revealed as the Messiah, in the context of his baptism ministry, he didn't know for certain, based on what God had told him, he didn't know for certain that Jesus was going to try to enter the waters himself. That took him by complete surprise. Why would the sinless Son of God need to be baptized in a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins when there are no sins?

So even John, here, as a prophet of God, he could not foresee all of God's purpose in ordaining the baptism of Jesus.

We know what God had in mind; we soon will. All John needed to know at the moment, here, was how to identify the Christ. How to identify him. John thought that would just happen. In the context of his baptism ministry, someone would come along and there on whom the Spirit descends, he thinks that is how it is going to happen. No, God intended for him to be in the water to get baptized, to come out and then for it to happen. He didn't anticipate this.

That was the most immediate purpose of Jesus coming forward for baptism, so that John could identify Jesus as the Christ and point other people to him. And when those heavens opened, and when the Holy Spirit descended, remained on Jesus, John knew who Christ was. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he," this is he, "of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because we was,'" he existed always, "before me.'" 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. You might wonder, well why didn't Jesus come to John right at the beginning of his ministry? Why does he waiting until more toward the end? He visited John toward the end of John's ministry, as we understand it here John's ministry continued for another six months or so after this baptism before Herod imprisoned him. We see in Luke's Gospel that Luke puts that prior to the baptism, but it's not chronological there. It's not meant to be. It's just to put the seal on John's ministry before he turns to Jesus. He wants us to focus on Christ. But Jesus wasn't waiting for a particular time; it's just that he was most likely putting his affairs in order at home back in Nazareth and that would have taken some time. We can suppose here that Jesus is a loving son

to his mother, a responsible man over his household. His father probably by this time had passed away, but he didn't want to drop everything and just take off once he'd heard about John. He didn't want to leave his mother without explanation, without some practical help. So it's likely that he prepared for her, he prepared the home, prepared the business, settled the affairs, and after all that was done, then he went on to see John. 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 are 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 leads 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 shortcut 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."

There are two more points left in our outline, and we're going to have to get to that next time. We just looked at the setting of the scene when God spoke from the sky, and it happened at the baptism of Jesus at the hands of John. We've seen what actually happened that day. We've seen the meaning of Jesus' baptism for John and also its significance for all of us. Next time, we're going to start by looking at the occasion of God's affirmation of Jesus, what occasioned that, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit, how God declared his unqualified approval. And it happened, you'll notice, just to give you a preview of coming attractions here, it happened there in verse 21, It happened when? While Jesus was praying." After his baptism, while Jesus was praying, you want to know what Jesus was praying about? Come back next week and we'll find out. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for this time together in your Word, trying to get our arms around the scene and what happened that day, but also around the significance of the theology here. And it's the meaning of all of these historical events. It's the meaning of all of this that is significant to us because it



means the forgiveness of our sins. It means that we abide before you with a clear conscience. And it means that just as the heavens are opened to your beloved Son, so also the heavens are open to us because there is only one way to salvation, only one way to you and that is through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. We're so grateful to celebrate those truths today, to learn about them, and also to celebrate them around the Communion table. So please bless our time around this table. May every conscience be free of burden and sin.