

Lesson 7: “This is My Beloved Son”
Matthew 3:13-17

Memory Verse: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).

Text: ¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Monday

There is something majestic and wonderful about the event recorded in our text for this week. This not only is the first text in the New Testament in which the Trinity is manifest for us, it brings everything that has gone on before in the Gospel into focus. Here for the first time, the Lord Jesus comes fully onto the stage. Here is where His ministry and work truly begin. Everything before this, even those events which happened when He was young were introductory and preparatory. Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth are all behind. From this day on the Lord would call no place His earthly home, but was on the move to fulfill His mission. After an eternity of glory in heaven and some thirty years of virtual obscurity on earth, the Messiah-King is manifested publicly for the world to see and know. The herald of the King has announced His coming, and now the King Himself appears.

We all know the importance of proper identification. When I was serving in the Air Force, I had the responsibility of defending a young Sr. Airman Miller. Airman Miller had a seven year old daughter and one of his daughter’s friends had accused him of sexual abuse. The little girl had been abused, unfortunately, and even more unfortunately for everyone involved, Airman Miller wasn’t the man who had done it. As best as I could discover, the child was victimized by her uncle, who had been living with her. Rather than pointing to a member of the family in her cry for help, she fingered my client Airman Miller. This is fairly common with younger abused children in this situation. Prosecutors and defense counsel even have a term for it: “transference.” It is often simply too hard for a child witness to point out the person that is truly hurting them. Now as you can imagine, if you happen to be the object of a transference of blame, then your reputation can be destroyed, your career ruined, marriage lost, children taken away, freedom taken away and your whole life essentially destroyed. This is what Airman Miller was facing, and not because the child was vindictive, or intentionally lying, or even because the child fully understood what she was doing. She didn’t.

I can tell you from experience, when your client is guilty, it doesn’t bother you too much. On a scale of ten, your stress level is about a one or a two tops. I mean, you do a good job and

everything, but you don't lay awake at night. When your client is innocent, though, stress pegs out at about 12 on a ten point scale, and you can just forget about sleep. The whole situation was absolutely driving me crazy, and I was just praying to God every day, several times a day, that He would somehow fix it.

Before the trial I was able to demonstrate from the facts to the government that the abuse couldn't have taken place the way the child claimed in her interviews, that is, it was a physical impossibility at the time and location she described. There were even other adults and children present at the possible times that could provide alibis for Airman Miller. The government didn't care. "Don't bother us with details," they said, "We have a seven year old witness and they always jumble the facts, everyone in the world knows that. But two facts are crystal clear, she was abused and she fingered your client." After that I got evidence to prove that she had been abused by her Uncle and expert psychological testimony showing transference was probable in her case. No way could they meet the standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

But, the government still didn't care. "Let's roll the dice and let the jury decide," the prosecutor said. He was "gutless" in my book. Didn't want to take responsibility for simply doing the right thing. After all, someone might second guess him or write a letter to the editor or some other such horror. What was Airman Miller's whole life compared to that!? Before the preliminary hearing, Airman Miller asked me, "What are the odds I will be convicted, even if we put forward all of the evidence we've gathered." I had to be honest, "We can definitely show reasonable doubt, but the emotional power of a seven year old girl, who has been abused, taking the stand and pointing to you as the one that did it, is very difficult to overcome. A jury could easily convict you on that alone no matter how much doubt there is, and it won't ever be overturned on appeal." He wept and I prayed.

We went into the hearing, and I prayed, "Lord Jesus, you know my client is innocent. Please just take this away. This family has suffered so much for six months. Please just take this away." The child came into the courtroom and took the stand. She described the abuse, and then the prosecution asked her the standard identification question, "Do you see the man who did this to you in the room today?" She looked around the room slowly and said, "No he isn't here." The prosecutor directed her to different parts of the room, there were only about five guys present, but she kept saying, "No, no, he isn't here." The prosecutor came and stood by the defense table next to my client and I and said, "Is the man that did these things to you sitting over here?" "No," said the girl. "Are you sure?" (Both of these were grossly leading questions, to which I didn't object, because the little girl was becoming absolutely adamant at this point.) "Yes, I'm sure!" she said. "He's not here." The prosecution took a break, during which I tried to be very helpful by suggesting they go pick up the uncle and bring him in before further questioning. They weren't amused. I went to my office and cried out to the Lord, and in spite of their coaching, things didn't get better for them after the break. By lunchtime the entire case against Airman Miller had collapsed and evaporated for lack of proper identification. As I recall, the defense counsel spent the rest of the week praising and thanking God.

You see, Beloved, proper identification or the lack of proper identification is a matter of critical importance. It is not just critically important for matters of criminal law, but it is critically important for spiritual matters as well. In Psalm 2 verses 11-12, God says “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” So, God has determined that the difference between “blessing” and “wrath” is “trust” in the Son. We are to serve Him with fear, and we are to Kiss Him, which is symbolic of swearing loyalty and submission to Him. And if we are going to do that, and if that is the difference between eternal salvation and eternal wrath, then it is critical that we know Who He is.

There are many deceivers. There were deceivers at the time of Christ. In Acts chapter 5, Gamaliel says in verse 36, “For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody....” In verse 37 he says, “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census....” There will be deceivers in the future. Jesus says in Matthew 24:23-26, “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it.”

There have been deceivers in the past, there will be deceivers in the future. There are deceivers today: The Jehovah’s witnesses would have you follow a Christ that is an angel who became a man, a created being. The Mormons would have you follow a Christ that is the angelic spirit-brother of Lucifer. The Christian Scientists would have you follow a Jesus that is an idea, an abstract principle, but not the Christ of Scripture. Islam would have you say that Christ was just a man, a prophet. Others would say that Christ is no different from other conceptions of God, such as Allah. Differing identifications and misidentifications of the Son, of Christ, run rampant and will run rampant throughout history.

And yet Peter says there is no salvation in any other, “...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). Therefore, the proper identification of the promised King who will Rule over the nations (Ps. 2), the identification of the Son (Ps. 2), the identification of the Christ is critical to all of us. If you fail to follow Him or if you follow the wrong Messiah, it won’t do you any good when the right one shows up.

Tuesday

There are those whose testimony has proven true, who have taken the witness stand and declared of the Lord Jesus, “He is the one,” and all of the scrutiny of history, all of the investigation and sometimes vicious and attacking inquiries of men have only served to verify, strengthen and prove that their testimony is true. We have no reason to distrust; we have no reason to back away; we have no valid reason not to believe what they have said. One such man is Matthew. And in this text Matthew testifies to four events or four evidences that reveal the identity of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the promised King, the Divine Son in whom we are to put our trust, to

whom we are to give our total submission with fear, trembling and joy. The first evidence is this:

1. The identity of the King is affirmed by John’s recognition (vv. 13-14). It says in verses 13-14, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You and are You coming to me?’”

Here is John, the greatest man to ever come from the womb of a woman other than Jesus Himself. He is a prophet and the greatest of all prophets ever sent by God. He has come in the power and spirit of Elijah. He was sent by God to preach the confession of sin, repentance, and baptism as a symbol of dying to the old life of sin and rising to walk in the new life of faith in and obedience to God.

Then, one day as he is ministering and teaching the people, John looks up and sees Jesus coming to Him. We know from John’s greeting that he recognized Him immediately. They were cousins, but they grew up apart, and we have no idea how much contact they may or may not have had before this time. One thing we can be almost certain about though, is that Elizabeth and Zacharias would not have neglected to tell John about not only his own miraculous birth and the announcement of the angel, but also the miraculous birth of the Lord as well and the events that surrounded it. John, therefore, knew that Jesus was far greater than him and that He had led a blameless life. This is obvious from verse 14, where it says, “John tried to prevent Him...”

It’s not difficult to understand John’s concern. His baptism was for confession of sin and repentance, something that he himself had need of; but Jesus had no sins to confess or be forgiven for. John thought that his baptism for repentance from sin was inappropriate for Jesus. He later acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, saying “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Why then should the One who takes away sin submit Himself to a ceremony that represents confession and repentance from sin? The Baptism was meant to make people ready for the arrival of the great King. Why, then, would the sinless King Himself want to be baptized?

John the Baptist knew that he, himself, was not sinless, “I have need to be baptized by You,” he said. He was saying in effect, “I am sinful like everyone else that I baptize. I need you to baptize me, but you don’t have any need that you should be baptized.” Among John’s many God-given insights into who Jesus was, what He was like, and what He was coming to do, was his recognition that the One who now stood before Him was without sin. As the book of Hebrews tells us of the Lord, He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet [He was] without sin” (Heb. 4:15). So we see in John’s recognition of Christ an affirmation of His true identity.

Explain in you own words why John felt awkward in baptizing Jesus? _____

What do we tell the world when we are baptized? _____

John went ahead and baptized Christ. Why? What can you do today out of obedience and respect for the Lord? _____

Wednesday

There is a second evidence that reveals the identity of Christ. It is this:

2. The identity of the King is affirmed by His purpose (v. 15). The purpose of the Lord was to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus answers John and says, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” In this statement Jesus does not deny that He is spiritually superior to John, and He doesn’t deny John’s obvious concern. Jesus understood John’s reluctance and the reason for it, and yet He tells John to go ahead and do what the prophet would never have been willing to do without such guidance. The Lord tells him that it is alright at this time for a very specific purpose: “to fulfill all righteousness.”

“Righteousness” means at its heart, in its essence, that which is God’s will. God is the One who defines what is righteous and what is good by His very being and His desire, and it was God’s purpose that the Lord Jesus be baptized. The obvious question then is “Why?” Why did righteousness require Jesus to be baptized when He had no sin to repent of and both He and John knew it? The answer to this question is not simple, and I believe that there are multiple layers of meaning in the Lord’s baptism. But there is one primary meaning that is essential for all of us to understand.

Jesus came into the world to identify, that is to associate Himself, with men and to identify with men who were sinful. He could not purchase righteousness for mankind if He was not willing to take up humanity with us, identify with us and take our place and our punishment. Hundreds of years before Christ’s coming, Isaiah had declared that the Messiah was to be numbered with the transgressors, to bear the sin of many, and to make intercession for them. Jesus’ baptism represented the willingness of the sinless Son of God to be fully associated with and numbered with the transgressors that He came to save. Jesus had emptied Himself and “made Himself of no reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6-7). He who had no sin took His place among those who had no righteousness. He who was without sin submitted to a baptism for sinners. In this act the Savior of the world showed His willingness to identify with the sinners of the world.

In addition, I believe that the Baptism of Christ set forth an example of obedience for His

followers. Jesus also came to set the ideal and the pattern for every man to live by, to give us a model. In His baptism He acknowledged that John the Baptist's standard of righteousness and teaching was valid, and by His actions He affirmed that it was the will of God that men ought to be subject to baptism. The Lord Himself would later command baptism for all His disciples.

Most importantly, I don't want you to miss the heart of the matter. Jesus was baptized because He wanted to fulfill all righteousness. Why is that significant? It is significant because Christ's righteousness becomes your righteousness when you come to Him in faith. So that when you stand before God at the end of your life, you do not stand before Him in the filthy rags of your own failed attempts at righteousness, but you stand before Him clothed in the very righteousness of Christ, safe and secure in the righteousness He gives as a gift.

The righteousness of Christ is very important to you personally. You see, Romans tells us that the first Adam was your representative, and he gave you a sin nature as your inheritance because of the fall. Don't be mad about it; you wouldn't have done any better. But the second Adam, who was Jesus, becomes your representative before God and gives you His perfect righteousness when you believe and come to Him by faith. It wasn't just His death that mattered. It wasn't just in His death that the Lord becomes a substitute for believers, but it was in His life also. Throughout 33 years of walking this earth, the Lord Jesus went day by day, moment by moment fulfilling all righteousness, so that His righteousness could one day be yours.

Imagine that where you are sitting right now, the center of a number line extends infinitely in both directions, to the right are positive numbers, 1,2,3,4, etc., to the left are negative numbers, -1,-2,-3,-4 and on and on. Now when you sin, you move down on the negative side, and with every sin you move further and further. Day after day you're going further and further down. And even when you do something that you think is good, it doesn't get you back up, because even your best deeds are tainted by some sin, "your righteousnesses are like filthy rags." So your case is hopeless, and you are helpless to get back up that number line. The sin just keeps mounting up day after day until you come to the end of your life and you are hopelessly lost somewhere down that line. None of us could even stand at the center of the number line and see you. We couldn't see you with binoculars after day one, Beloved. The Hubble telescope couldn't find you after a year.

Now what did Jesus take care of on the cross? He took care of all that sin, wiped it out, erased all the negative numbers in your life, past, present and future. But if you take care of all the negatives, Beloved, where does that bring you back to? It brings you right where you sit, back to zero, back to neutral. What you need is not just mercy to get you back to zero. You need true righteousness to get you from zero all the way to glory. That is why He lived a life fulfilling all righteousness, so that His righteousness could be imputed to you the Bible says, so that you could stand before God, not just forgiven, but clothed in the positive righteousness of Christ.

The purpose and the actions of Christ identify Him as the true Messiah. No false Messiah will ever live a life that fulfills all righteousness. No other view of Christ than that of Scripture, like

those you find in Mormonism or Islam or other religions, fulfills all righteousness either. For example, Joseph Smith and Mormonism teach that Jesus was a polygamist when he lived on earth, the husband of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and Martha. This blasphemous view of Christ is obviously different and false and not the Christ testified to by the author's of Scripture, the one who fulfilled all righteousness. There has never been a false Christ or a false conception of Christ that fulfilled all righteousness. Only the Lord revealed to us by Scripture.

How did Christ fulfill all righteousness? _____

Why is it important for us that He did so? _____

Thursday

The first two evidences that affirm the identity of Christ which we've seen this week are: 1) the recognition of John and the purpose of the Lord, Himself. There is a third evidence. It is this:

3. The identity of the King is affirmed by the descent of the Spirit (v. 16). Verse 16 continues, "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him."

Just as the veil of the Temple was torn in two at the moment of Jesus' death to show that perfect access to God was given by the sacrifice of Christ, so here at the moment that the Lord emerges from the water the heavens are opened to show the closeness, the love and the relationship between the Father and the Son. This was not something that only Jesus saw, but John the Baptist also saw the event as he says in the Gospel of John chapter one verse 33; and, it was this event that confirmed for him beyond any doubt that Jesus was the promised King.

The Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and a dove as you know is a symbol of gentleness and sacrifice in the Scripture. Why did the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus? When He became a man, Jesus did not lose His divinity. He was still God in every way, though He voluntarily set aside the prerogatives of deity. So what is happening here?

In the military we had very special ceremonies when a person was promoted to the next rank. Everyone from the office and friends from around the base would gather together at the appointed time. The one that was being promoted would stand up next to the flag and his or her commander would talk about the person's accomplishments in the rank in which he had been

serving. Then, either the commander or a friend would stand to read the official order promoting the person to the next rank. After the order was read, the promotee would raise his hand and take the oath of office before everyone. Then the person's spouse would come forward and pin the new rank on the left shoulder because it was closest to the heart and the commander would pin the new rank on the right. There were always lots of pictures, and afterwards we would have a dinner, usually with a shrimp platter. The office would often take the rest of the afternoon off to have a fun activity together, volley ball, a picnic, or something like that.

The Spirit's action was also a sign, a marvelous sign of the office that Christ was coming to fulfill. All of the ancient kings of Israel, if you remember, were anointed with oil prior to assuming office and embarking on their ministry before God. The oil was meant to be a symbol of the Spirit of God, who anointed them, set them apart, and chose them. Here God Himself is anointing the Lord Jesus for His service as the promised King and Messiah.

Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners." And here at the very beginning of His appointed ministry. God gives a unique, visible, confirming sign that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, whose coming God had called John to announce and to prepare men to receive.

Consider for a few moments, what does this passage tell us about the triune nature of God? _____

What is the significance of the Holy Spirit taking the form of a dove? What scriptures back up your answer? _____

Is this encouraging? Why? _____

Friday

We have seen three ways in which the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Messiah is affirmed by this text. There is a fourth way:

4. The identity of the King is affirmed by the words of the Father (v. 17). A voice came from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

For any sacrifice to be pleasing to God it had to be pure, spotless, and without blemish. The Holy Spirit came down as a dove symbolizing the Sacrifice that Christ was going to make as the anointed King. John the Baptist declared Him openly after this event, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Jesus willingly identified Himself with sinners by His baptism, and the Father now announces openly and publicly from Heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” He was the perfect One, the One pleasing to the Father; the One whose life and sacrifice would be acceptable; the One who could truly serve as a substitute for us on the cross.

The word “Beloved” refers to a deep, rich, and sincere love relationship. The Son is the beloved of the Father. He is the One in whom the Father delights and rejoices. And, did you know that the Scripture tells us that when we trust in Christ, we enter into the Beloved. We also become the beloved of the Father, those in whom He delights and whom loves because we come to Him through His Son. Because the Father finds no imperfection in His Son, He now by His grace forgives us of all imperfection and clothes us in the radiant beauty of Christ.

The title, Son, as it is used of the Lord in Scripture and as the Jews understood it, is a title of equality, not a title that says the Lord is somehow less than the Father, but that He is equal. And Jesus is the only begotten, the one and only Son. There is no other. He is the One that manifests God and makes Him known. He is the radiance of God’s personal glory and the exact representation of His being according to Scripture. He is the image of His invisible being - the revelation of God. In Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily, (Col. 2:9). As one commentator wrote, “Even God’s title as Father is a reference to His essential relationship to Jesus Christ, as He is presented in the New Testament most often as the Father of the Lord Jesus than as the Father of Believers. The Titles are [most often] meant to emphasize the sameness of essence - that is deity.”

John 5:23 sums it up this way, “... all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father....” In other words, if you do not receive and love and honor the Son whom Matthew identifies and declares to us, and whom the other authors of Scripture declare to us, then you do not receive God. You do not honor Him and you do not love Him.

What pleases God? _____

How are you able to please God today? _____

Why is this text important to us? Why does Matthew include it? How are we to apply this text?
Five thoughts:

1. The most obvious reason is that he wants you to believe and embrace the Jesus of Scripture as the true Son of God, to trust Him, to give Him your allegiance and loyalty and be blessed and forgiven. That is why he testifies to these events.
2. Just as Jesus was willing to give Himself as an offering, to die and sacrifice Himself for the love of the Father and us, so we should be willing and ready to sacrifice ourselves for Him, in whatever service He might call us to.
3. Jesus had no sin. And because Jesus was willing to walk humbly and to be numbered with sinners, so we should cast off all pride and self-exaltation.
4. The purpose of Christ's life was to "fulfill all righteousness." He is our Lord and our example, and we should set our hearts on the same goal, fulfilling all righteousness. And though we may struggle and fall, we should never give in or give up, but we should be determined and persevering in honor of the Lord we follow.
5. Jesus was not only honoring the Father, but He was reaching out to us in His baptism. Let us be willing to reach out to others and associate ourselves with them in their need.