

“New Beginnings for a Gospel Vision”

Matthew 3:13-17

January 7, 2018

Two weeks ago yesterday I had the tremendous privilege and honor of preaching at my Mom’s funeral. I can’t possibly express enough, how deeply thankful I am for the outpouring of love that you, our church family, has lavished on us. For your kindness and for your prayers, thank you so much! Never before, has our living hope in Jesus been so precious to me as in these recent days. Indeed, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21)! The end of my mom’s life on this earth was the beginning of her new life of heavenly joy.

Scripture Reading [**Matthew 3:13-17**]

It’s really quite difficult to grasp how startling, perplexing, and glorious the baptism of Jesus is without seeing it in the context of John the Baptist’s ministry in vs. 1-12. John came preaching a baptism of repentance: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (2). He was appealing to those whose conscience was gripped by their sin and as a result wanted a new beginning in their relationship with God.

John’s ministry was to stir the conscience with a conviction of sin that led to repentant hearts. He was breaking up the fallow ground, preparing the way for an even greater work of the Spirit through the One who would come after Him. John’s preaching and baptism were preparing for the coming of Messiah, whose ministry would exceed John’s. He was making ready the way of the Lord (3).

John was baptizing in water for repentance but Jesus would come baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus’ ministry would give repentant sinners the power to actually live repentant and obedient lives through the Spirit’s power and issue divine judgment against those who failed to repent.

So it’s quite startling and perplexing when vs. 13 records, *“Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.”*

Even John the Baptist, the prophet Himself, is rattled. He tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized by saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and You come to me?” (14). John knew his baptism was not for everyone.

Earlier in vs. 7 he refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were not worthy of his baptism—he knew they didn’t have repentant hearts. But now he’s reluctant to baptize Jesus because he knows Jesus is too worthy for it.¹ He knew that Jesus was without sin—the only one without sin—so how could He be subjected to a baptism of repentance?

In a sense, Jesus acknowledges John’s concern, that normally it wouldn’t be appropriate for Jesus to receive this baptism in the same sense others did, when he says, “Permit it at this time...” (15). There is something unique about this moment in time that makes the baptism of Jesus both necessary and significant. But what is it? Jesus gives His reason by simply saying, “in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (15). The question is, what does “fulfill all righteousness” mean? What is Jesus referring to?

The basic sense of righteousness simply means to do what God requires. Matthew seems to use righteousness in a very similar way the OT used it, to refer to conformity to God’s will. Jesus is saying to John, you must allow me to be baptized at this point in time because without it we can’t fulfill all that God has willed. So what is so important about Jesus’ baptism that God’s mission for Jesus hangs on it?

Through His baptism, Jesus identifies with John the Baptist’s ministry, thus identifying with sinners in need of repentance. Furthermore, the whole purpose of John’s ministry was to clearly point to the Messiah. Thus, Jesus’ baptism marks the beginning of His ministry which is the beginning of the messianic age and the inauguration of the kingdom of God.

This is confirmed when Jesus comes out of the water and the Holy Spirit comes upon Him—anointing Him and empowering Him to live a human life

¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Matthew 1-7*, pg. 76.

of obedience and holiness that would be counted as righteousness before God. The anointing of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism signals the beginning of His ministry as the Messiah or Anointed One.

This was further confirmed by the Father who speaks from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." The Father is announcing His favor on His Son. Earlier in Hosea 11:1, God referred to Israel as His Son, but they forfeited His favor through their persistent rebellion. Now Jesus has come to fulfill the role that Israel failed to as the righteous Son of God.

By the way, this is one of the great passages of Scripture in which we see the doctrine of the Trinity on display. All three members of the Trinity as operating distinctly yet harmoniously as the Son comes out of the water, the Spirit descends, and the Father speaks from heaven.

Let me highlight four things we have seen in this passage that have deep personal implications for us:

1. *Jesus' identification with sinners* in need of repentance.

Baptism is all about identification. Believer's baptism today is about identifying with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. As we identify with Jesus in baptism, so He identified with us in His baptism.

In a sense, Jesus steps into the river of our sin, willingly identifying with it so as to take it upon Himself. When John's disciples were baptized, the water symbolized a washing away of sin. When Jesus entered the same water to be baptized, it symbolized a taking on the burden of our sin. He did symbolically at His baptism, what He would do in reality at the cross where He was baptized in our sin with all its guilt to bear it unto death under God's justice. Jesus' baptism is a picture or a preview of the cross.

2. *Jesus' righteousness*, doing what God has willed for Him to do, namely identifying with sinners for the purpose of taking our sin

upon Him in order to remove it from us. Jesus never acted independently of the Father, but meticulously did all that the Father required of Him.

3. *The Spirit's Anointing.*

Jesus lived His human life according to the Spirit's leading and empowerment. The result was a life of obedience and holiness that would be counted as perfectly righteous before the Father, a human righteous earned that would become the basis for our own righteousness in Christ.

4. *The Father's Favor.*

Because of His righteous life, nothing would hinder the Father's perfect favor on His Son. It would be infinite and full! All of God's joy and delight would be centered on Jesus.

So why do I say that these 4 things are deeply personal? Because these four things have become true of every person who is in Christ. If you have repented of your sin and turned to trust in Jesus, you become One with Him, in relationship with Him—you are in Christ.

- ***To be in Christ means that He has not only identified with your sin, but has taken it upon Himself and removed it from you.*** When you confess your sin, you are signing over the ownership of your guilt to Him so that it is no longer yours but His, paid for by the infinite worth of His death as the Son of God.
- ***To be in Christ means that the righteousness Christ earned through His human life belongs to you,*** just as a husband's assets are fully shared with his wife.
- ***To be in Christ means you are given the Holy Spirit to empower you for godly living.*** You can walk in obedience, You can grow in holiness, as you yield to the Spirit's leading and empowerment. I John 2:27 speaks of the anointing we receive through Christ—the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit for every believer.

- ***To be in Christ means that you have the Father's favor.*** The very favor of God for His Son becomes the favor of God that you receive because you are One with Christ.

What we see in the baptism of Jesus is the beginning of His earthly mission, to seek and save the lost, the very mission that we are called to share in at the end of Matthew's gospel. Jesus said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (28:18-20).

The question is, how are we going to do that? We know that the great commission is not optional for the church. But where to we begin. I want to suggest that we begin where Jesus began, with a willingness to identify with sinners in need of repentance. But how do we do that?

Our elder team has been wrestling with this very question: *how can we be more effective at engaging our communities with the gospel?* We realize that if we were going to be more faithful in outreach, we need to grow more of a culture of outreach as a church family. But how does that work? The answer is not merely more or better programing. It has to be based on relationships just as Jesus' ministry was based on relationships.

Yet change is hard, so we began to ask ourselves, what are our greatest strengths at Trinity that could be leveraged toward growing a stronger culture of evangelism and outreach. One of the things that we learned through our discussions with you about church membership over the last year or so is that one of the things we most highly value at Trinity is relationships. And that's a good thing.

So how can we leverage our deep value for relationships, to share the gospel more effectively with our community? The answer seemed to be captured in one word: *hospitality*. Of the course the most obvious place for us to share hospitable is in our homes, but ultimately ***hospitality is opening our hearts and lives to people in such a way that we invite them into a relationship with us for the purpose of pointing unbelievers to a***

relationship with Christ and encouraging believers in their relationship with Christ.

The best way to share the gospel (especially in today's culture) is out of a relationship of genuine love and care. And as our culture becomes more and more secular at the core, there are more people who lack the biblical background or context to help them understand their need for the gospel. And so it seems that we need to invite people into ongoing discussions over the Word that help them understand the gospel over the course of weeks and months.

So beginning in 2018, we want to encourage you to join us in a simple three-fold vision that we can progressively grow into over the next several years of **opening our hearts, opening our homes, and opening the Word** to our friends and neighbors. There's a lot of overlap between these three things, but this year we want to focus on opening our hearts.

Opening our hearts involves:

- Intentional movements of prayer
 - Prayer for specific people in your sphere of influence
 - Prayer gatherings that focus on growing our passion for Christ, compassion for people, and drawing the lost to Jesus.
 - "Seek God for the City" – 40 days of prayer beginning in February and culminating on Palm Sunday praying for every aspect of our city as well as for our world.
- Life group training
 - Our current series on the gospel is deeping our own understanding and growth in the gospel as a daily way of life.
 - Next fall we want to introduce to you a series on small town mission—processing how to apply the gospel in our small town context.

Then we want to progressively grow toward opening our homes, especially with next year in view, not only pursuing our fellowship with one another, but also opening our homes, and decks, and firepits, and grills, to those God

has given us burden to pray for—to build relationships for the opportunity of sharing Jesus with them.

Finally, we want to take hold of opportunities to invite unbelieving friends into opportunities to discover the gospel from God’s Word—to let them experience the ministry of the Spirit through the word opening their hearts and eyes to see Christ as their eternal hope. Wouldn’t it be great to see our life groups not only exist for our growth and encouragement but also as strategic opportunities unpack the gospel with our neighbors and friends.

We want you to invite you into helping us dream, pray, and discover how we can open our hearts, our homes, and the Word with very people Jesus came to identify with who live in our neighborhoods and communities.

Communion

As we come to the Lord’s table this morning, we come to express our love and confidence in Jesus who came to identify with us as sinners, who came to live among us to take our sin upon Himself, to take our sin from us. We come to remember the cross where Jesus was baptized with the guilt of our sin so he could be baptized in Him for the forgiveness of sin and life eternal. So I encourage you to come to the Lord’s table this morning worshiping, praying, rejoicing. And where sin remains, come confessing, signing over the ownership of your guilt to Jesus who alone can release you from its debt.

Bread: “Lord, thank you for coming to identify with sinners like us. For stepping into the river of our sin, to take our guilt upon yourself to take it from us. Thank you for living a human life of perfect righteousness that we might come before the Father on the basis of Your merit. Lord, we don’t want anything to hinder the perfect fellowship and joy of forgiveness that You have provided at such great cost, so Lord give us the grace in this moment to sign over our guilt as we confess to You our sin.”

Cup: “Lord, thank you for the favor You have lavished on us in Christ. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to walk in obedience and grow in holiness. Make it our joy to live for

Your pleasure above all else. Use us as instruments in Your hand, to bring the goods news of Your grace to all who are yet to be reconciled to You in Christ.”