

Matthew 3:1-17

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Preacher: Zac Skilling

[0 : 00] And in this episode, the Pharisees and Sadducees come out, and John says to them, he tells of Christ and says in verses 11 through 12, he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit in fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. The short of it is he will gather his people, the wheat, while judging the unrepentant, the chaff. And so right after this foretelling by John, what do we read? Verse 13, then Jesus came.

Matthew's making it overtly obvious, just with that one word, then, that Jesus is the one of whom John spoke.

Of course, God's declaration of his son will make that abundantly clear, but even here in verse 13, we have enough to demonstrate Jesus is greater than John.

[1 : 16] We also learn from verse 13 that Jesus identifies with his people. Jesus identifies with his people.

Continuing there, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. Matthew begins his gospel account with a genealogy in chapter 1, verse 1.

That genealogy, if you recall, is organized around the Babylonian exile. He gives 14 generations before the exile, 14 generations in the midst of exile, and 14 generations after exile.

Although, for Matthew and the Old Testament, for that matter, they speak in such a way that the exile never really truly ended.

There's never full reconciliation with God. There's never the Davidic king long-awaited, long-expected, that would rule forever. The temple is not quite what you expect at the end of the Old Testament.

[2 : 28] And so there's this sense of, we're still not home yet. Things are not all right. And just one example of how Matthew views this ongoing exile is his fulfillment quotation from Jeremiah 31, verse 15, which says, Now Matthew quotes this in chapter 2, verse 18, after Herod has killed a bunch of children.

And then Matthew says this passage is fulfilled. Yet, Jeremiah, in his context, is speaking of a time when God's people are led in captivity.

So this is one indication, among many, that Matthew views his present moment, first century A.D., the time of Christ, as still yet a time of exile.

Israel is not made at home. In fact, when you look at every one of the fulfillment quotations in Matthew chapters 1 through 4, of which there are many, every single one is speaking in a context of exile.

And so Matthew sees this ongoing exile, and he makes it clear, too, in chapter 1, that the cause of this exile is sin.

[3 : 57] Just as Israel was led in captivity in the Old Testament due to their idolatry and wickedness, so, too, in Jesus' day, did the people remain in exile for their sin.

He indicates this not only by the baptism of repentance that we're reading about, but in chapter 1, verse 21, the angel of the Lord says to Joseph, of the Christ child, he says, you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Okay, so, here's how all this ties in to Jesus identifying with his people. Jesus comes to be baptized in the Jordan, in the wilderness.

So, again, Matthew is playing on this exile theme to say something about Christ. There's a lot of symbolic imagery conveyed by baptism.

The submersion of baptism signifies being under the wrath of God. Of course, you think of this because of the flood in Genesis 6. You also might think of the Exodus account when Moses leads Israel through the Red Sea.

[5 : 13] It's parted. God parts it so they can pass through safely, but then he collapses it to crush Egypt, Pharaoh's army. So, it is both a salvation for Israel and a judgment on Egypt.

And so, I think Matthew intends our minds to think about all these things. Perhaps most directly, though, he intends us to recall Joshua.

For one, Joshua's name is the same as Jesus's, and we translate it in English or transliterate as Joshua. In Hebrew, it's Yeshua. But Jesus is just the Greek transliteration of Yeshua as well.

So, it's the same name. You might call the book of Joshua the book of Jesus in a sense, right? Same name. And it simply means God saves. And more so, recall the Jordan in Joshua.

In Joshua chapter 3 through 4, God parts the Jordan so Joshua can lead Israel out of the wilderness, out of the exile, so to speak, into the promised land and conquer it.

[6 : 21] So, Jesus, in great humility, is identifying with his people Israel. He does this by reenacting their entire history.

And Matthew shows us this. It began in the genealogy, continues in chapter 2 where he's persecuted by Herod and has to flee to Egypt like Moses was persecuted by Pharaoh. Further still now in chapter 3 the baptism reenacting several significant Old Testament moments in the story and life of Israel. And it goes on if you read chapter 4 Jesus goes further into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil while he's hungry.

That sounds a lot like Israel in the wilderness. And then chapter 5 Jesus ascends the mount and gives teaching on the law. Well, that sounds a lot like Moses and Israel.

And this goes on and on and on throughout Matthew but you get the point. Matthew is carefully weaving this story to show how Jesus identifies with Israel.

[7 : 24] He is the new Israel. So in his great humility in his great wisdom and mercy Christ is symbolically saying through the act of this baptism I will take on my people's exile.

I will take on their sin by going in to exile. I will bear what they have born. Now by itself that doesn't make sense.

How does Jesus entering exile help his people? And since he is without sin born of the virgin why would he participate in a baptism of repentance to begin with?

This kind of thinking I think is what led to John's objection in verse 14. Did you notice he would have prevented him saying I have need of you but you come to me?

So why would John baptize Jesus? Why would Jesus initiate this? Well we then learn from Jesus response that Jesus is the savior of his people.

[8 : 29] Jesus is the savior of his people. Go ahead and look at verse 15. Jesus answers John saying permit it for now in this manner it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.

Now Jesus is not saying that the act of baptism saves us. This is not a proof text for so-called baptismal regeneration. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone apart from works of the law.

Just one example consider the thief on the cross whom Jesus forgives and promises today you will be with me in paradise. Clearly the thief in his final moments of life on the cross was saved yet without baptism.

So this can't be what Jesus means. Nor do I think Matthew is talking about the imputation of righteousness. Now doctrinally speaking I do believe that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers.

Paul makes that clear in Romans 4 verse 3 he writes Abraham believed God and it was counted to him or reckoned as righteousness.

[9 : 49] So that idea of imputed righteousness is true it's biblical it's essential it's wonderful but I don't think that's what's being discussed in Matthew 3 15.

I think people who say otherwise have a case of right doctrine but wrong text. Rather in Matthew the term righteousness usually conveys salvation or more commonly in Matthew a ethical righteousness as an actual good works.

And this does not mean Matthew is preaching a different gospel than Paul. It's not a contradiction between the two at all. It's just that he's emphasizing something different using the same work.

And this is why people can get confused. So an example of the ethical use of righteousness or the good works sense of it is Matthew 5 10.

Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake. Clearly Jesus intends in that passage those who are persecuted for living righteously by doing the right things being the right kind of person.

[11:01] An example of righteousness used to convey salvation in Matthew would be Matthew 6 33. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

The coming of the kingdom inheriting the kingdom entering the kingdom. These are all ways to describe salvation and God's rule and reign. And so in chapter 6 verse 33 Matthew puts kingdom of God and righteousness in tandem.

It's a package deal. So in our text chapter 3 verse 15 I think both these uses of righteousness are in play.

Jesus is saying that in the manner of baptism we will fulfill all righteousness. Both this ethical righteousness by keeping the law doing good works perfectly but also the long awaited salvation that Israel longed for in exile.

He's saying I will bring this about as your just and righteous king. So Jesus is saying something about the manner in which he will save his people.

[12:13] He is our savior we've seen that but he's also saying something about the manner in which he will save us. But we already saw it's not baptism that saves so what is he showing us? What is it that saves us?

What is Jesus saying? Well this is the next thing we learn. Jesus is saying he will suffer for his people to bring peace and new creation through the spirit.

Jesus will suffer for his people to bring peace and new creation through the spirit. Go ahead and look at verse 16.

when he was baptized immediately Jesus came up from the water and behold the heavens were open to him and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.

So immersion really matters to understand this imagery. This isn't just a Baptist shtick. This matters. Jesus goes under the water.

[13:19] He's not dabbled by it. He goes under. And significantly this signifies death. Being under the wrath of God.

And Paul certainly understood it this way. Romans 6 4. He says we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of father we too might walk in newness of life.

Now Jesus' audience in Matthew would have understood this imagery as the Old Testament often has negative connotations for water. So again this is largely due to the flood as I already referenced that would be a big symbolic thing in their mind when it comes to water.

So in Matthew 3 16 Jesus is foreshadowing his own death. This is why he says in verse 15 in this manner. In other words in a way similar to what I'm about to symbolically enact we will fulfill all righteousness.

Christ goes down into death to identify with his people but importantly as verse 15 says he comes back up immediately and so thus he foreshadows his resurrection and the resurrection of all believers.

[14:50] But this is not all that is signified in this scene. The imagery goes on and it reminds us that the gospel is not merely a free get out of hell jail card. As great as that is as much as I love that it is even better more full more rich more satisfying Jesus brings peace and new creation through the spirit.

In the Greco-Roman world there was a common practice called augury. This was a practice where augers would examine birds, their flight patterns, their cries, what types of birds and these kinds of things.

And after they examined all this information on a given day it would reveal the will of the gods. If you want to know what this looks like, come find me on a Saturday morning. You may recall this from the movie Troy if you've ever seen it.

They look at the birds and they're like, oh yeah, we're going to be good. But then they're not, so the city is besieged. But nonetheless, that would be an example of augury.

It's a big deal, very widespread, very common. Even Jews probably participate in this, you know, the ones who were less faithful to Yahweh. And significantly, certain birds were associated with

certain omens.

[16:12] The eagle was favored because it signified strength, military superiority, and prosperity. This was the preferred bird for kings and generals, and this is why the Roman armies carried an eagle standard and not a duck standard.

Right? And likewise, it is why Nazi Germany, even the United States of America, and many other nations since then have used eagles as a symbol for their military.

It is a sign of strength, superiority. On the other hand, you have the dove. One of the less respected birds in augury.

The dove symbolized peace, gentleness, love. That sounds great to us, to a Roman. I'm going to bully you. Right? That doesn't sound that great.

You don't want the dove. It kind of makes you look a little weak. You want the eagle, especially if you're a king. You want the eagle. So you can imagine the shock when in Matthew's gospel, which is the royal gospel, the kingly gospel, where we are constantly reminded that Jesus, the son of David, is king and lord.

[17:27] The shock when a bird descends from heaven, and it's not an eagle. It's a dove. He did not come to conquer the Romans and lead a military campaign.

He came to bring peace to sinners stuck in exile who need to be made bright with God. Further, this dove symbolizes new creation.

So keep in mind, it is the spirit of God coming in the likeness of a dove. This calls to mind Genesis chapter 1 verse 2, which says, the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Now that verb, hovering, is a word often used to describe birds. And a lot of ancient interpreters connected this hovering word with the dove that we read about in Matthew 3.

More concretely though, the dove recalls Noah after the flood. In the narrative of Genesis, God wipes out humanity with a worldwide flood and essentially starts creation over.

[18:43] First Adam messed up, well, I'll make a new Adam. His name's going to be Noah. I'm going to keep him and his little family alive and wipe out everybody, wipe out the land. I'm going to start over. Let's see how this goes.

Not that he knows how it's going to go, but you get the idea. So in the narrative, you're expecting, okay, things are going to get better. We got a new Adam, second chance, right? Well, not so.

He floods the earth and things don't go so well for Noah and his family later on due to sin. And so you're still awaiting this new Adam, this new Noah.

But in that story with Noah, he becomes this new Adam, tragically fails, but the key to this is Genesis 8. In that passage, Noah is on the ark, the flood is ending, he doesn't know if it's over yet, and so to test if there's land, he's on a ship, right, the ark, he sends out a dove.

And of course, the dove does not return to him once he sends it out, and so that's how Noah knows it's safe to get out. There's land. The dove went somewhere. So notice here, this context is hinting at a new creation.

[19:54] When you string all these threads together, as I believe Matthew intends us to, the picture is clear. Jesus will suffer for his people to bring peace and new creation through the Spirit.

It's just as John the Baptist said in Matthew 3.11, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. He does so as the anointed one with the Spirit to bring about the promised new covenant in which all members will receive the Spirit.

Now, just in case someone thinks I'm being a little too creative here making this up, just consider what Paul's understanding of baptism is once more.

We already saw from Romans that Paul understands baptism as death and life imagery. In 2 Corinthians 5.17, we get a little further insight into Paul and how he understands baptism.

He says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

[21:08] That really enhances how we understand Paul in Romans 6.4, which I read earlier, when he says that we are in newness of life.

This is all new creation language. When we baptize someone, we as a church and they as an individual are making a public proclamation that so-and-so is in Christ, so-and-so is a Christian, so-and-so is part of the new creation.

this was anticipated by the Old Testament prophecies of the new covenant. You think of Ezekiel 36, 26-27, which says, God speaks and he says, I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. So, notice again that new creation language, new heart, new spirit, referencing the Holy Spirit who's given. So, I think it is clear then that Matthew 3-16 is presenting the baptism as a new creation act. This is the beginning of the new. And one major implication of these truths that I've just expounded is that we Baptists got it right. Baptism is only for those who are actually in Christ.

[22 : 49] I love our Paedo Baptist brothers and sisters, but they're just wrong about this one. Just try and find a passage where someone is depicted as new creation who is not also saved and elect.

Right? You won't. So why would we baptize persons signifying they are of the new creation when in fact we have no idea and believe it possible for them to not be elect a new creation?

It just doesn't really compute with the Bible. So baptism is for those publicly recognizing they are in Christ within the context of a local church that shares that assessment.

And this is why the elders when they baptize someone here say John Doe having made a credible profession of faith we baptize you in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit you have been buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in the newness of life coming from Romans 6 4 new creation language so we'll come back to this in our application but I hear now why this new creation thread is on your minds because it is hard to follow so I wanted to mention that now so Jesus is going to suffer he's going to bring peace he's going to bring about this new creation through the spirit but who is Jesus that he can do all this well this is the next thing we learn about Jesus it jumps off the page at you in verse 17 Jesus is son of God and king of kings Matthew 3 17 God speaks from the opened heavens and says this is my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased God makes this declaration of his son to his son and the crowds over here and what a wild scene and that Jewish crowd would immediately recognize these words God is combining two passages from the old testament we read one of them this morning he's combining psalm 2 7 and isaiah 42 verse 1 psalm 2 7 says the lord said to me you are my son there's that echo today i'm begotten isaiah 42 verse 1 reads behold my servant whom i uphold my chosen in whom my soul delights i've put my spirit upon him and he will bring forth justice same word for righteousness to the nations now psalm 2 is a coronation psalm you heard nathan preach on this just a couple weeks ago this psalm speaks of in its original context

[25 : 52] David but in its messianic ultimate context Christ and this psalm was likely read in Israel whenever a king was coronated crowned and so it's significant that Jesus would choose to quote this at the baptism this is the crowning of the king he's making it clear this is my son the king of kings and likewise psalm 2 speaks of God's eternal plan with his son to judge the wicked to save the righteous how they laugh at the plans of the wicked and how Christ son will conquer all and so in this baptism God's indicating i'm going to conquer the world not through war not through military might through peace through sacrifice through my son in whom i'm well pleased so this is the king of kings he's being recognized as king in this baptism and then the reference to isaiah 42 likewise evokes the wider context of isaiah particularly the servant songs as they're known of isaiah 40 through 55 i'm not going to read all that but this passage depicts the coming messiah as a servant pleasing to the lord the servant will bring justice to the nations like psalm 2 says this servant will die for the many for their transgressions to make atonement see that in isaiah 53 in short so much of what we have already seen and talked about that we've seen symbolically in the act of this baptism is made explicit by these quotations in the declaration from the father and so in closing friends all i can say is behold your God king Jesus the beloved son of God empowered by the spirit came to save his people from their sin and exile by identifying with them and suffering for them to secure peace and begin the new creation so in closing i just want to offer a few reflections and applications number one repent and believe right do you know this king have you repented of your sins and placed faith in him why wouldn't you what or who is greater that would prevent you and have you publicly made this repentance and believe clear by obediently being baptized you are under the wrath of

God you are in that exile and the day of judgment is drawing near so don't presume on tomorrow right go to the Lord today secondly guard the membership at Providence Baptist Church we are an elder led congregational Baptist Church every member here has a God given responsibility to guard the membership of the church this is not just a job for the elders the deacons the people who

volunteer a lot this is for everybody if you're a member God holds you responsible for the membership of this church so again baptism is for those who are of the new creation that's the elect regenerate persons members of the new covenant who are always regenerate according to Ezekiel so don't abdicate the responsibility

God has given you as a member to vet potential new members right be as certain as you can be that you are welcoming someone into the fold who is truly a Christian right to bring in an unregenerate person and baptize them is to confuse the gospel damage the witness of our church and bring disorder third be a peacemaker life is crazy there are factions everywhere opinions in every finger misunderstandings offenses all kinds of stuff that divides people leads to bitterness anger hate and exile to bring peace he says later in Matthew 5 verse 9 blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God bring peace to the relationships and situations within your spheres right in some cases that might mean for you that you need to seek forgiveness maybe you wronged someone and you know it maybe you need to be forgiving someone's wronged you and you're not letting it go you need to forgive that person initiate reconciliation bring peace it may require that you hold your tongue and impatiently endure wrongdoing right you might not be able to bring about reconciliation in every situation but so far as it depends on you bring peace be a peacemaker and you will be called a son of

God and lastly delight yourself in Jesus my mom called me picky growing up I prefer that I have a complicated pal I used to think I was picky but I've realized if I'm with someone who knows food well which I don't I can't make Kraft macaroni but if I'm with somebody who knows food well their opinion is usually right and so I've become that guy at restaurants who always asks the waiter what do you recommend you know it doesn't mean I'm going to go with it but generally I do and I do this because I know I don't understand food I don't really know what's good for me I wouldn't try things without somebody telling me that I trust this is really good and because of this practice I've learned to love a lot of dishes and food items I never would have tried on my own like shrimp I don't know why it just looked gross when now it's like one of my favorite things so if that is all true how much more so is it true that we should embrace what

God delights in I honestly don't understand it in one sense like a question I sometimes ask myself how can the eternal God who knows all things and is everywhere all the time and is all powerful not get bored how does he not become dissatisfied I mean that's just confusing to me as a fallen human there is so much I don't know there is so much I have not experienced there's so much room to grow in the few things I'm competent in and yet I get bored all the time I get dissatisfied all the time yet here in Matthew 3 the father says the eternal unbegotten father without beginning without end eternal father says he is well pleased in his son who he's been with that entire time now at a human level you would think that would get old but here he is declaring joyfully this this one is my beloved son in whom

[33 : 44] I'm well pleased he's never grown tired of him he's well pleased he has no greater delight than his son Jesus so friends take it from the father and always delight in Christ his love his justice his mercy his sacrifice his power his glory look to Jesus as the fulfillment of your deepest and greatest longings let's pray