

The Path of Surrender - Matthew 3:13-17

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE WAITING AND WATCHING

It had been over 700 years since the prophecy had been given...700 years of very difficult times for the people of Israel. The glory days of King David and King Solomon had long since crumbled to pieces in ruin and decay. The judgment of the Lord for the rebellion of Israel and Judah had fallen hard on the people, resulting in brutal conquering by other nations, years of exile in foreign lands, and now a humiliating existence under Roman rule, subject to the whims and fancies of whatever king the Roman Emperor placed over them. Yet in these hopeless times, many still held out hope...hope in the one true God and his promised Messiah.

The prophecy, found in Isaiah 42, verses 1 through 9, had said this about the coming Messiah:

"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 "He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the Lord, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the Lord, I have called You in righteousness, I will also hold You by the hand and watch over You, And I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. 8 "I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. 9 "Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you."

This Messiah would be God's chosen One in whom God would be pleased and God would his Spirit upon him. God would hold him by the hand and watch over him and appoint him as a covenant to the people and a light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison. Come, Messiah, come.

Well, for the past 30 years especially, hope had been building among the people of Israel that Messiah was about to appear. Rumors and stories had been floating around of miraculous pregnancies and births, angels appearing to people with messages about Messiah, a group of wise men from the east following a star they said was leading them to Messiah...These were exciting times! And yet, God's timing had a way of really challenging people's patience. 30 years ago the stories were fresh and exciting and indicated an imminent unveiling of Messiah. But that was 30 years ago and still nothing. Where was Messiah? Were these just all rumors and made-up stories, giving people false hope? How long, O Lord? How long? Have you ever asked that question?

Well, recently, there finally seemed to be some action. A strange, but godly man, called John the Baptist, had appeared at the Jordan River preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And guess what? He was about 30 years old! Oh my! And the words he spoke and the life he lived was unlike anything they'd ever seen. He fit the description of the old-time prophets, and everyone knew that prophets like that had been noticeably missing from Israel for more than 400 years. Could this be the one? Could John be the Messiah?

Well, as everyone was asking themselves this question, John went ahead and popped that bubble, saying, as recorded for us in Matthew 3, verses 11 to 12:

11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Sorry, folks. It's not me. But the good news is, he is coming soon and my job is to prepare the way for him by preparing your hearts through repentance.

Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 through 17, which pick up immediately after this statement John just made about the One coming after him...the One who would baptize with much more than just water. The very next thing Matthew records as happening after John made that statement was this, beginning in verse 13 of Matthew chapter 3:

13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" 15 But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him. 16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

The coming One was here! May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and prepare our hearts to understand it by the power of his Spirit.

II. THE CHRIST'S SURRENDERED OBEDIENCE IN BAPTISM (Matthew 3:13-15)

The Coming One arrives from Galilee for baptism

Well, if you've been paying attention in our study of the gospels so far, this is the first time we've seen Jesus in action since age 12. For 18 years he had been quietly living in the un-reputable town of Nazareth, learning his earthly father's trade of carpentry and his heavenly Father's pattern for godly living. Jesus was living a quiet, but godly life, "off the radar" of anything significant from the world's perspective, but "off the charts" of significance from God's perspective. These were not wasted years in God's eyes, but an essential training ground and preparation for the challenging path God had in store for Jesus. Keep this in mind, when you struggle in your own life with God's timing and plan, which almost never fits with the timing and plan we have in mind. The amazing truth is that God uses all things in our lives, no matter how mundane or unexciting they may seem, to prepare us for his call on our lives and make us more like Christ.

Grow where you are and don't waste years of your life wishing you somewhere else. God has a purpose and plan in it all.

If you're wondering how I know Jesus was about 30 years old when he came to John for baptism, I promise I didn't make it up. In Luke chapter 3, verse 23, Luke tells us that Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. Additionally, Mark tells us that Jesus came to John directly from Nazareth. Following the Father's lead, Jesus left Nazareth and arrived for baptism by John at just the right moment.

Even John needs baptism by the Christ

Well, as we look at our passage, we notice that John had some serious reservations about baptizing Jesus. John actually tried to prevent Jesus from being baptized by him, telling him it should be the other way around. Interestingly, from a passage in the gospel of John, it's clear that John the Baptist did not yet know with certainty that Jesus was the actual Messiah when he first arrived for baptism. That certainty only came when he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove on Jesus and remaining on him. So we might wonder, why was John so adamant about not baptizing Jesus if he wasn't yet sure that he was the Messiah?

Well, we need to remember that John most definitely already knew Jesus personally this point. Their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, were close relatives who both experienced miraculous pregnancies, heard amazing messages from angels about the true identities of their sons, and shared their experiences with each other. It's unthinkable that they then went their separate ways with no communication or relationship after that. John would certainly have known who Jesus was and had an idea of the godly character of his life and that God had a special role for him to play in the coming of Messiah. In knowing Jesus this way, John evidently felt uncomfortable baptizing someone whom he viewed as far more godly than himself.

This gives us a profound insight into John's godly assessment of himself. Though he was full of the Spirit and walking closely with God, he had no illusions that he was sinless and deserving of God's favor. He didn't let the adoration of the crowds inflate his ego and make him think he was righteous in himself. He knew

that just like everyone else he needed the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. And who better to do it than his godly relative, Jesus.

The Christ's baptism by John was fitting for fulfilling all righteousness

Well, interestingly, Jesus didn't disagree with John. He didn't say: You don't need baptism either, John; you're good. Or, you're right, I'm sinless and I'm not going to subject myself to the humiliation of baptism. People might think I'm admitting sin if I do it. Instead, Jesus seems to affirm that John is right in the statement he made. John does need baptism by Jesus and a baptism of repentance doesn't seem to make sense for someone who has nothing to repent of. And yet, he responds to John by saying, ***"Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."***

Unconcerned about appearances or about what people will think, Jesus recognizes that this is part of the Father's plan for fulfilling all righteousness. This is the beginning of the humble obedience to the will of the Father he will need to live and breathe in order to fulfill his mission on earth. To rescue the sons and daughters of the first Adam, the second Adam will need to humbly walk their same path in complete righteousness and obedience to the Father. In beginning his ministry with baptism, Jesus was demonstrating humble obedience to the will of the Father and identifying with the people he came to save.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary describes it this way: "...the [Suffering] Servant's first mark is obeying God: he 'fulfills all righteousness' since he suffers and dies to accomplish redemption in obedience to the will of God. By his baptism, Jesus affirms his determination to do his assigned work...at this point Jesus must demonstrate his willingness to take on his servant role, entailing his identification with the people." It's important to remember as well, that Matthew's use of the word 'righteousness' always means 'conformity to God's will.' In beginning his public ministry with baptism, Jesus was demonstrating his willingness to obey the Father's will and follow his plan no matter where it would lead.

III. THE CHRIST'S UNVEILING AND FILLING THROUGH BAPTISM (Matthew 3:16-17)

Coming up from baptism while he was praying: Behold 3 miracles!

Well, after Jesus convinced John that this was God's plan, and the fitting way for them to fulfill all righteousness, John permitted Jesus to be baptized by him. And this is the only baptism John permitted that didn't involve repentance and confession of sin. As we've seen in our previous studies, John baptized people as they confessed their sin and repented. Our baptisms today always involve the same things. But this was obviously not possible for Jesus to do, since he had no sin to confess and nothing of which to repent. But as Jesus submitted to the will of the Father and humbly received baptism at the hands of John, BEHOLD, some amazing things started happening and that 700 year old prophecy finally came to fulfillment. Three miraculous signs appeared as Jesus came up from the waters of baptism: The heavens were opened; the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended and landed on Jesus; and a voice came out of the heavens. Jesus' true identity was confirmed to himself and revealed to John the Baptist and perhaps others.

Luke gives us the additional information that these miracles occurred not only while Jesus was being baptized, but also while he was praying. In other words, even as Jesus was being baptized, he was communicating with the Father, and in this case the Father communicated back to him in a very big way. If Jesus had had any remaining questions about his true identity and mission, they were gone as he came up out of the waters of baptism. He is undoubtedly that prophesied Servant, God's chosen One with whom He is well-pleased, and the One on whom God put his Holy Spirit. He is the Lord's Anointed from Psalm 2, the One to whom the Father said: ***"You are my Son; today I have begotten You. Ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession."***

Jesus was ready to begin his ministry in the power of the Spirit and with confidence in the mission God had given him, and John was now enlightened about the true identity of his close relative, Jesus. Jesus was actually the One whose sandal he was not even worthy to untie. Imagine grappling with that reality about one of your relatives you grew up with!

Listen to John's later testimony about his experience at the baptism of Jesus, found in John chapter 1, verses 29 to 34:

29 The next day [John] saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31 "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33 "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34 "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

John was convinced. He had already been told by God that the One for whom he was preparing the way would be revealed in a specific way: the Spirit in the form of a dove would descend from heaven on him and remain on him. John knew this ahead of time and this is exactly what happened at Jesus' baptism. John now knew that this truly was the Son of God.

Why do you think the Holy Spirit was revealed in the form of a dove? Have you ever thought about that? Well, of course only God himself knows all that he intended with this image, but we do have some clues. According to the *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, "the dove was an ancient symbol of purity, innocence and gentleness." This is confirmed by Matthew 10:16, which uses the phrase, "innocent as doves." And certainly as we look at Jesus' life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit, we see perfect purity, innocence and gentleness in action. The Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, is pure and holy, and was able to fully indwell the pure and holy Son of God, empowering him for the difficult mission ahead.

Well, what John may have assumed would be another normal day of baptizing repentant sinners turned out to be the big day he and all Israel had been waiting for. After 30 years of waiting for Messiah's unveiling, it finally happened with the voice of God himself, the opening of the heavens and the descending of the Spirit as a dove! Through humble obedience to the will of God in baptism, Jesus was unveiled as God's beloved Son and filled with the Holy Spirit for ministry.

IV. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Well, what does this all mean for us today? What would God have us take away for our own lives and struggles right now? Well, several things stuck out to me as I studied this passage. First of all, be patient with God's timing. I'm sure most of you have noticed that 99.9% of the time it's quite different from ours. Jesus seemed to have a pretty good idea who he was and what God was calling him to do at age 12 in the temple. And yet, the Father determined that 18 more years of learning the carpenter trade and living a quiet, ordinary life was needed before Jesus was ready for the next phase.

It's so easy and natural for us to want to get to the exciting, adventure-filled, call of God to do something impressive and earth shattering. We struggle in the mundane, tedious, day-to-day challenges of life and wonder when God's going to do something big and exciting through us. But let's learn to be patient...to be content growing where we are right now with whatever God has called us to do at this moment, even if it's not as glorious as what we had imagined it would be. God is at work and using whatever you're doing and facing in your life right now to mold and shape you and grow you. Perhaps he'll call you someday to do something really big and exciting, but if so, he's preparing you for that right now, so make sure you're paying attention and learning so you'll be ready like Jesus when that moment arrives.

Secondly, Jesus shows us the character of a truly godly and righteous life, and what does it look like? It looks like full and complete surrender to God and his purposes and a lifestyle of constant communication with him. Jesus could have validly argued that he didn't need baptism. He could have decided to skip that part so that no one would assume he was admitting sin. Yet he knew without a doubt that his baptism by John was the Father's plan and come what may, he was going to follow the Father's plan wherever it led. His eye was fixed on heaven's purposes and nothing could pull him from that path.

As our example, Jesus teaches us to walk in his footsteps. He's calling us, in our lives today, to walk in the same attitude of complete surrender to God and his purposes, even when his purposes and plan seem too hard or not fun or too humiliating or too risky or even illogical. Have you reached the point in your life where you're fully ready for whatever God has for you, or are you still pursuing

your own purposes and goals and hoping God will just get on board with you? I don't think I need to convince you that God works powerfully through people who are ready to take the path of full surrender, no matter what it may bring. Let's make sure we're on that path in this new year!

And finally, let's not miss the beautiful parallels between what Jesus experienced through his baptism and what we experience in being baptized by Christ through repentance and faith in his work on the cross. Think about it. As Jesus came up from the waters of baptism, three things happened: he was identified as God's Son, he received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and God expressed that he was well-pleased with Jesus. What about us? Do any of these things happen to us when we come to salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, a process symbolized through the water baptism we undergo later?

Well, Scripture tells us that at that moment of salvation, we actually become God's adopted children. Our new identity as God's children becomes a reality. Of course, Jesus didn't become God's child through baptism like we do, since he always has been and always will be the Son of God, yet God did reveal his true identity through his baptism. Secondly, as the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and remained on him following his baptism, we also receive the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit at that moment of salvation. Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit and empowers us for life and ministry with God! And finally, as the Father expressed how pleased he was with his obedient Son, at the moment of salvation through Christ, we are also finally pleasing to God through Christ. We move out from under his wrath and judgment to become recipients of his love and mercy and forgiveness. We have peace with God at last and become people on whom God's favor rests.

There are some beautiful similarities between what Jesus experienced at his baptism and what every person experiences when Jesus Christ baptizes them spiritually through repentance and faith in his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Jesus showed us the way! Make sure you've been baptized by Christ. I'd love to help you get there. Come talk to me!

My prayer as we close today is that all of us, like Jesus, are ready for the path of full and complete surrender to God. Let's fully embrace whatever God has for us and watch as he fills us up with his Spirit and guides us into the good works he's prepared for each of us.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Read Matthew 3:11-17 several times asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it.

Write down from the passage or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

Read Isaiah 42:1-9 and Psalm 2. What are the various ways these two passages tie in with what happened at the baptism of Jesus? What parts of these passages are still to be fulfilled in the future?

Jesus lived the first 30 years of his life primarily in the un-notable town of Nazareth, learning the carpenter's trade, before the Father indicated it was time to begin his public ministry. In what ways do you struggle right now with having patience for God's timing? Knowing that God has a purpose in each of our lives right now, what are some things He wants you to focus on as you seek to grow where you are right now?

In His entire life and specifically here in his baptism, Jesus exhibited a complete willingness to do whatever the Father asked him to do; even when, from an earthly perspective, it didn't seem to make sense. How would you describe your current desire for and willingness to accept whatever God has for you? What are the current obstacles to fully embracing God's will and purposes for your life?

If you've been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, you've become God's child, you've received the Holy Spirit, and in Christ you are pleasing to God. God's favor is on you and he wants you to live fully in your new identity as his child, by the power of His Spirit. What are the challenges of actually living in this new identity and what are some practical things you can do to transform your thinking in this area?