

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:13-17)

There he was baptizing and preaching down by the river. He had seen a lot of different people from all sorts of different backgrounds making their way down that rocky difficult trek down to him. Then he sees him. What is he doing here? We are not sure how much John the Baptizer knows about who Jesus really is. They were relatives and so there's a good chance they would have seen each other growing up at the Festivals in Jerusalem. Now Jesus is 30 years old coming to John to be baptized by him.

John is not sure what to do. He recognizes there is something significant and very different about him. You know how quickly we notice things—he doesn't lose his temper or use that language, he takes words and actions in the kindest way and doesn't have cruel thing to say about anyone, he respects and honors everyone no matter what—you quickly catch on to that type of stuff. With Jesus, that's just how he was. That's how he was all the time. Never once was there a slip-up. Not once did he fall to peer pressure. Not once did he get caught up in the moment or caught off guard. Maybe by this point John was making some guesses—maybe this Jesus was the one for whom John was preparing the way? So, it's a strange request to John that Jesus should want to be baptized. Baptism is for people who sin. Baptism is for those who have done wrong. Baptism is for people who need to be saved. “I need to be baptized by you,” John insists.

To a point, John is not wrong. John recognizes his own deep need. It's the same deep need that we all have: the need to be saved. It's not something we want to admit. We don't want to be helped. We'll confess that we do when it gets to that point in the service. We might say that when in a bible class. You might admit it when you find yourself in a bad place. But we don't like to admit how true that is. We don't need just a little nudge to pop us over the hump; we are drowning in the cesspool of our sins dragged down with no ability to pull ourselves out.

Even when we know better that idea that there's a little good in everybody keeps on popping up. Why else we are shocked and say, “I can't believe he would do something like that” when we see humans do such terrible things to other human beings. Why do we feel such frustration when the child just doesn't do what she is

supposed to do? That might be why we can't understand it when she doesn't just get over that sin, do better.

We realize there are some things we do need help with and, "I want to be better." But most of the time that's with certain vices and more visible sins. You want to not use that type of language and say those kinds of things. You need help being more patient with your family and understand/listen better to your friends. You need help to not be so reliant on those different substances and websites. You need help taking better care of your body with the food you eat and how much you exercise. You want to be more productive with your time and waste less of it. You want to gladly hear and learn God's Word and stay in it more frequently. You maybe even made New Year's resolutions or goals and accomplishments you are hoping to find the motivation to achieve.

These are all good and fine things to want to do better. But the situation is far worse! You don't need just a quick tune-up or polish off the rust and dust. You are by nature infected with a far worse disease than cancer. It's so terrible that it even stains and wrecks the good works you do too! It has to be killed! But on this side of eternity, it's not going to disappear. Its ugly head pops up whenever you are vulnerable and especially when we tell ourselves, "I've got this on my own." Maybe there's even a part that wants to believe there is a little good in everyone because if that's not true, where does that leave you? If we better recognized how deeply lost we were and human beings are, maybe we would ignore the possible uncomfortable consequences and discomfort to chase after those who have wandered from church and the word. If we better recognized the dire situation we are in, maybe we would more readily run to the altar to receive Jesus' precious gift of his body and blood for forgiveness and strengthening. If we stopped lying to ourselves and comparing ourselves to other people, maybe we wouldn't let anything stop us from going back to our baptisms to drown that old man of sin in confession. But even then the strength and desire to do this does not come to us on our own!

No, we need someone to do it to us. We need him to bring us along with him. We need him to work in us to will and to act according to his good purpose. As pious as John sounds, Jesus corrects his understanding. Jesus doesn't say that John doesn't need to be baptized but that's not why Jesus is there on that day. Instead, Jesus insists: **"Let it be so now, it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."**

That's why Jesus needs to be baptized. Jesus doesn't need to be saved. He had no sins to be saved from. Sin has no hold on him and Satan has no power over him.

But Jesus still needs to be baptized. Why? To fulfill all righteousness. Fearing God above all things, loving God's will for his life and for all people, trusting God's promises and invitation to be true, He would not despise his Father's gifts and reject them. Jesus needs to be baptized to save you. Like with your own baptism, Jesus' baptism isn't done to complete a task to keep God happy with him. At the same time, it certainly does fulfill God's will and pleases the Father. At the same, Jesus does it to fulfill righteousness—to be right with God, be holy, be without sin.

Jesus' baptism wasn't just him doing something and going through the motions. That wouldn't make any sense; God makes it abundantly clear he has no time for lip-service, just doing the right thing. No, even with Jesus, baptism does something. So, Jesus steps into the Jordan River alongside the cheat, the liars, the half-truth twisters, the judgmental and self-deprecating, the too-busy dad and over-worked, under-appreciated mom, the lonely senior citizen, and the self-consumed teenager, because Jesus needs this water and word just as much as you me. Then he steps out of the water and immediately the heavens open to him, the Spirit of God descends like a dove on him and Jesus hears a voice speak to him for the first time since he took on flesh and made his dwelling amongst us thirty years before: **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”**

What an assurance to John who just baptized Jesus; Jesus allowed him to take part in this important work to fulfill all righteousness and the Father is well-pleased. What assurance for Jesus as the sin-bearer and suffering servant! He would be rejected by so many; he would see Satan oppress the people and attack him, he would watch loved ones fail time and again—into the same sins too. Temptations to wallow in a personal-pity-party and doubt his Father's will and love would have been great. But he has the Father's promise: “You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well-pleased.”

But he doesn't just receive assurance, Jesus is anointed with the Spirit and power! It's not like Jesus didn't have this power already; he was true God from eternity, there in the beginning, and is God. At the same time, Jesus himself will say it was by the power of the Spirit that he would cast out demons and release Satan's grip on God's people. With the Holy Spirit's power Jesus completes the work he had been sent to do. He always had and never lost this power or capability while still relying on the Spirit to use it. What a mystery.

But ultimately the reason Jesus does this isn't for himself. It's all for you. By the Spirit's descent and the Father's voice we see this is the one God sent for you! This is the one who brings justice to the nations, opens the eyes of blinded in unbelief, to set us free from slavery to sin and release from death's steely grasp. Here is your

prophet who preaches the Good News: Your sins are forgiven. He speaks the truth: because he lives you also will live. This one stepping out of those waters is your Priest who comes not to be served but to serve. He stands between you and God and pleads on your behalf. He offers the sacrifice, not of animals, but his own body and blood on the altar of the cross to make you at one with God. He carries your sins, suffers for them, and he pays the price with his blood and life. This is God's chosen one, his own Son who he gave up for us all, who dies for us while we are still sinners so that we might be made right with God. And we know that the Father is well-pleased with this one's work: he would raise Jesus to life again. This is your King who lives to rule eternally, protecting and preserving His church and you, his people.

And now, for the sake of this one's perfect life, innocent death, and rising from the grave, the Father is well-pleased with you. How? When we see how often we have failed and so frequently mess it up even on our best days. When we see how we are but beggars with nothing to offer him or could be worthy of his pleasure. How? Your Baptism. Jesus needed baptism to save. You need baptism to be saved. You didn't need just a nudge in the right direction or a push over the ledge. No, your old man of sin needed to die. So, in those baptismal waters you died with Christ and your sins were buried in his tomb. And from those baptismal waters you were raised with Christ a new creation wearing his robes of righteousness and his perfection. When the Father looks at you he doesn't see your sin, he sees the Son and you without sin. The angels in heaven rejoiced as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit put their name on you. Those waters with the word washed your sin, all the sin committed against you along with its stain away. It took away the stench of death. It ripped you from Satan's grasp so he holds no power over you. And you were given even more! Marked with the cross on your head and heart and baptismal waters running off your head you were given the power to resist sin and its temptations. You were given the power to run from the devil with the promise he will flee from you. You were given a clean conscience before God. You were given life eternal. You were given the Holy Spirit who does this work in you to will and to act according to God's good purpose. Because Jesus is baptized to fulfill all righteousness this is how you stand. I am baptized. God loves me. I am God's child. God is well-pleased with me. Amen.