

Matthew 3:13-17. 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 lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Behold! The Savior emerges in fulfillment of all righteousness.

"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

These are the first words of our Savior recorded for us in the book of Matthew. If you have a red-letter bible that designates the words of Jesus with red print, these are the first red-letter words; but why these words? Why are these words significant? What do these words even mean? And why did the sinless Son of God have to be baptized in the first place?

In these words and the surrounding events of this familiar section of scripture we have a telling emergence of the Savior. Matthew tells us that ***Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John***. This was part of God's plan and it would soon become clear to everyone around that something special was happening here. The Father would tear open the heavens and announce his pleasure with his Son. He would make it known that Jesus was the Christ and then send him on his way with a public blessing, a public coronation of sorts as Jesus was anointed as the one chosen by God to bring salvation. It was now very clear that Jesus had come to do the Father's work. The baptism of Jesus would mark the start of Jesus' public ministry. The Father would give him his Spirit and would send him on his way to carry our sins, to fight against Satan, to be unwavering in his preaching and teaching as he took up this mission to save us. Jesus came to be the Savior, the Christ, who was promised and chosen by God. Jesus came to be the Lord our Righteousness.

And the Lord God wants us to see this. The Lord God wants us to straighten up and pay attention. For those familiar with the King James Version you would recall that the word "lo" is used twice. Lo or behold are both attention grabbing words. This is something that is worthy of our attention. Something special is going on here and God wants us to see this. God wants us to see the Christ, Jesus our Lord.

As so now we stand here between the two major festivals of all Christendom, Christmas and Easter, and this is certainly not a lull in the action. This is not a time to take off from worship and then come and stop by again in a few months when the next big festival happens. This is not what our attitude as Christians should be; yet this is the

trap, the temptation, into which many fall. No, today instead we begin our journey from Christmas to Easter, from manger to the cross and we see the Lord Jesus, the child born in Bethlehem, emerge as the God-man who would save us. We follow his footprints through the desert and over the hills and valleys, and all the dusty paths through Judea, Samaria, and Galilee on which he traveled to share the good news of our salvation.

This mission that our Savior takes is an important one. And so we take note. We straighten up. We pay attention. We learn more about his mission, how it was in fulfillment of God's plan, how this shows the Father's grace that he would send his Son into this world. We watch as we see our Savior's power; we witness his compassion; we take notice of his persistence in saving us. We listen and we learn from him as he teaches us and shows us how to live as children of God. And with gratitude in our hearts we praise him for the love that he showed in coming to this world to save us. And we humbly serve him and follow him. In thankfulness for all that he freely gives to us we do our best to follow his commands. Behold, the one chosen by God emerges from Nazareth to save you.

This is the first look at the Savior in the book of Matthew since he was a child. Matthew tells us of the visit of the magi, the flight into Egypt, and the return to Nazareth after the death of Herod. But now the boy born in Bethlehem had grown into a man. And now the time was right for him to come onto the scene and be revealed as the Christ. For the stage has been set for the promised hero, the promised Savior. John who had made a home for himself in the desert in the region of the Jordan River had attracted people to him with his preaching and had prepared the people by telling them to repent. John was the voice that woke up the people and told them to beware of God's judgment. The promised Messiah would come to bring both judgment and salvation to this world of sin and he was near. Now more than ever was the time to watch and listen. As John put it, the Messiah, the Christ, would gather the wheat to himself and then the chaff would be burned up with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:12)

Now more than ever is the time for us to listen. Sin separates the sinner from God. And sin needs to be punished. We as sinners sin daily. We as sinners need to be washed and cleansed from this filth or we face eternal death. We need God's forgiveness, his pardon, and salvation. John, the Baptist, knew this. He knew that this was the case for everyone, including him; everyone, that is, except for Jesus, the sinless Son of God. That is why John was a bit confused when Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by him. Jesus was spotless and blameless, without a speck of filth, without a single stain of sin; and so John looked at Jesus and said, ***"I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"***

John knew that Jesus was the Messiah, the one chosen and sent to save, but this truth was not yet plain for all to see. And so Jesus replied. ***"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."*** That was all that John needed to hear and he soon consented to baptize Jesus.

But what does that phrase mean? What did it mean that it was *proper for Jesus to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness*? Well, for Jesus this was the right thing to do on so

many levels. Jesus was the Christ. He was the Messiah, the anointed one. And so like the Old Testament prophets, priests, and kings were anointed and it was declared publicly that this was God's special servant, so too it would be made known that Jesus was the servant of the LORD. John knew who Jesus was, but others did not. Others simply saw a man from Galilee who came to be baptized. But when Jesus came out of the water and God made it clear that this was the Christ. The voice from heaven announced his approval. The Spirit of God descended upon him just like God had promised would happen. This was the servant of the Lord that Isaiah had promised. This was the Christ would bring sight to the blind and set free those held captive by sin and death. Jesus was the one who came to fulfill all of God's commands perfectly as our substitute and this mission was put on public display when Jesus was baptized.

This was the right thing to do. The baptism of Jesus would fulfill all righteousness because Jesus was carrying the sins of the whole world. For thirty years already, he had been carrying this burden. Now he would carry that burden into the desert and fight head to head with the devil. For thirty years he had carried these sins perfectly as our spotless substitute and now Jesus was refreshed and renewed and sent on his way to carry them all the way to the cross. What a blessing it must have been to receive that assurance! What a blessing it is to come up out of that water and hear the Father's voice, see the Holy Spirit's presence, and be assured that God was pleased with his work.

Dear friends, behold this special scene. Lo and behold, your Savior emerges. Behold the one chosen to cleanse you from your sins and to give you victory over sin and death and even hell itself. Behold, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the beloved son of God goes on his way to redeem you.. This event would fulfill all righteousness, because here Jesus, son of Mary, from the town Nazareth would be revealed for what he was, the Son of God sent from heaven. And here at Jesus' baptism the Father would put an endorsement on this mission of redemption. God the Father would thus also put his stamp of approval and all the things that his Son would teach and do. Jesus came to save us and he came to teach us how we are to live thankful lives of obedience to God.

In a few weeks we will be taking a look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon we are blessed with our Savior's instructions on how we are to live our life. But some have taken this sermon to be a way to heaven, instead of hearing these words come from the one who is the very way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus saves us by his grace alone. We must see that we cannot save ourselves. We cannot follow God's commands perfectly nor can we follow our Savior's instructions in the Sermon on the Mount perfectly. We don't always love God with all our heart. We aren't always meek and humble. We can't obey God's law perfectly. We can't save ourselves. Instead we need the one who came out of the water to be our substitute. We need his perfect life. We need his perfect sacrifice. And we need our baptism that connects us to his victory over sin and his reward of eternal life. In his sermon on the mount he will speak about how those who have this victory by grace alone are to live.

As the Savior emerges from the water we are reminded of how we our baptism connects to our Savior through pure grace. In your baptism you were washed we were cleansed by the grace of God. In your baptism God gave you and undeserving sinner Christ's righteousness and his holiness. His years of perfection were given to you. Your repeated failures and sins and repeated transgressions, all the wrongs that you would commit were washed away. Our baptism is a means of pure grace which connects us to Christ and his righteousness. It saves us and brings us into God's family. And now God who was pleased with his Son is now pleased with you.

In baptism the Holy Spirit descends upon us and we are brought to faith, and now our baptism daily strengthens us and renews us in the faith. It refreshes us to live lives of thankful obedience to Jesus the Christ, the one whom God anointed to save me. Jesus is indeed the one God anointed to save all of us, just as God promised from the beginning. Behold! Your Savior emerges from the waters of the Jordan to save you, to give you righteousness, to give you peace with God, victory over sin and death, and eternal life. Truly Jesus would come and would do everything good and right, everything that was according to God's righteous and wonderful plan to save us.

Yes truly these words, these first words of Jesus recorded for us in the New Testament are very poignant words. It is a phrase loaded with purpose and grace. These are words that deserve our attention. These are words that rightly set the scene for an event that grabs our attention. ***"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."*** Behold this is the Son of God, this is the chosen Savior, this is the one God sent to save us from our sins and to give us his righteousness. And now behold as God the Father sends him on his way with full approval.

So dear friends, during these weeks between Christmas and Easter, behold, take notice of the one sent by God to save you. See your sins plunged under the water with him. Behold, your sins washed away. Look and see your Jesus emerge as the very Savior that you need. Watch him, who would serve as your perfect sacrifice, accomplish your salvation. And with hearts filled with thankfulness listen to him and watch him closely as he teaches you how to live as a redeemed child of God.

Behold! This is the one whom God had promised. This is the one whom God had sent to save us. This is Jesus, the Christ; the Anointed One. Let us forever praise and follow him who was chosen by God to be our dear Savior from sin. Amen.