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Epiphany / Matthew 3:13–17

Introduction

One of the fascinating features of Matthew's Gospel is the way it retells Israel's history. It begins, as Israel's history does, with a genealogy of Jesus harkening back to the book of genealogies, Genesis.

Just like at the end of Genesis, there is a Joseph having dreams who goes down into Egypt, so too in Matthew there is a Joseph having dreams who will eventually go to Egypt.

Just like Pharaoh murders the innocent Hebrew sons in Exodus, Herod murders innocent Hebrew.

The parallels go on, but this morning we focus on Jesus' baptism in [Matthew 3](#). This event is also reminiscent of Israel's history when Israel crossed the Jordan river as they entered the land. It happens in the same place and even in the same direction (from east to west).

What all this signifies is the profound fact that in Matthew's gospel **Jesus is Israel**.

Jesus stands in for Israel and relives Israel's history. Jesus ascends a mount and delivers God's Word as Moses did. Jesus wandered in the wilderness for 40 days as Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years. Jesus travels through the land delivering people from demons as Joshua (Jesus' namesake) made conquest of the land. Jesus tells wise parables about the Kingdom as Solomon wrote wise sayings and ruled over the kingdom of Israel. Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus offers sign after sign to the rulers that they should repent!

Jesus is Israel, re-living Israel's history as a faithful Son.

Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry and it is accompanied by the heavenly declaration of the Father's good pleasure in the Son.

Jesus' baptism marks the first actions of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. So far we have heard about Jesus being born and various events around his birth, but this is the first time Jesus is portrayed by Matthew as taking action. And Matthew shows us three main things in Jesus' baptism:

1. In verses 13-15 Matthew shows that Jesus' ministry is in continuity with the Old Testament.
2. In verse 16 Matthew presents Jesus' baptism as the beginning of a new creation.
3. In verse 17 Matthew shows the uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God.

Continuity with the Old Testament (vv. 13-15)

[Luke 16:16](#) tells us that John the Baptist represents the conclusion of "The Law and the Prophets" and the coming of Jesus establishes the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

While there is certainly a difference between the ministries of Jesus and John the baptist the differences are often misunderstood. This can lead to a tragic misunderstanding of the entire Old Testament. For this reason it is important to understand this transition from John to Jesus that the gospels portray.

When Jesus comes to be baptized by John, John responds by saying, "***I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?***"

Jesus does not enter into his ministry doing away with the ministry of John but submitting to it. Remember, Jesus is the true Israelite and he is showing the way into the kingdom. Just as Israel entered the land by passing through the Jordan from the wilderness many centuries ago, Jesus is saying the way into the kingdom is going to follow the same pattern...and I'm going first, I'm showing you the way.

John was out in the wilderness beyond the Jordan because John represented a renewal movement within Israel. John was calling Israel back to the wilderness of repentance so that they might re-enter the land again.

This is why it is fitting for Jesus to submit to John's baptism saying that it is to "**fulfill all righteousness**".

This does not mean that Jesus was not already the perfectly righteous. Rather, Jesus is rightly carrying out his mission as he has been sent by the father.

In the prophetic writings, the term "righteousness" was all about the establishment of right order and justice.

As Jesus submits himself to the baptism of John, he is fulfilling all righteousness in **this** sense. He is going to be the Spirit-filled servant of the Lord who will bring right order and justice to Israel as the prophets promised of old. This starts by Jesus submitting himself to John's baptism as the true Israelite, re-entering the Land to set things in order.

- › Of course our baptisms are connected to Christ. We are baptised into Christ and, as such, into *his* baptism. All Christians baptisms are applications of this one baptism of Christ. In his baptism, Jesus was commissioned to be an instrument of righteousness. And so are you. You are commissioned in your baptism to be an instrument of righteousness to the world around you, bringing right order and justice.
- › Children, your baptism into Christ means that you are called by God to be an instrument of righteousness in your home. This looks like obeying your parents and seeking to live in harmony with your siblings.
- › Adults, your baptism likewise means you are called to be an instrument of righteousness in your life. In your marriage, with your children, in your work, you are called to be an instrument that makes it on earth as it is in heaven.

This is a high task, the good news is that God always equips His people for what he calls them to. This is seen most clearly in verse 16.

Jesus as New Creation (v. 16)

The actual baptism of Jesus is more or less skipped over as Matthew moves to show the incredible events that take place immediately after Jesus' baptism. The first thing that happens is spelled out in verse 16 when Jesus comes up from the water: "**and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him**"

Ever since Adam was expelled from the Garden, man's fellowship with God had been severely hampered. The way the garden is presented in the Bible is the place where heaven and earth meet. In that place, man met with God and God met with man. The heavenly realm of God's presence and the earthly realm of man's habitation overlapped.

Throughout the story of the Bible we see glimpses of how this might be restored. Jacob's ladder ([Gen 28:10-22](#)) is an early glimpse. This theme becomes more and more clear in the Tabernacle and then later the Temple. Both of these structures are the place where God and man can once again meet, and if you pay attention to the details, the Tabernacle and Temple are fashioned as glorified gardens.

So at Jesus' baptism we see that the connection between heaven and earth is not longer concealed in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle or Temple. No, what we see in Jesus' baptism is that Jesus himself is the connection between heaven and earth. It is through Jesus that man can once again commune with God fully and freely as man was once able to in the garden.

Associated with this is the fact that Jesus is presented as the beginning of a New Creation.

Remember that in Matthew's Gospel, scenes from Israel's history are shaping how Matthew writes. In this scene we have Jesus coming up out of the waters **and the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.**

This is the imagery of New Creation in the Bible. [Genesis 1:2](#) states that "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." Then again when God destroyed the first creation and remade the world in The Flood we have similar imagery of re-creation as waters cover the earth and a dove goes forth from the Ark.

In Jesus' baptism, Jesus is presented as the beginning of the New Creation. The prophets have promised from of old that God would remake the world and do away with all wickedness and evil. In Jesus' baptism Matthew shows us that these promises begin to find their fulfillment in Christ.

- › This too, should help you to understand your own baptisms as you are united to Christ in it. In baptism, you are made into a new creation by the Spirit. In [Romans 6](#) Paul states:

Romans 6:3-9 ESV

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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 the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

- › This means that the application for you is the same that it was for the Romans as Paul continued to address them in [Romans 6](#):

Romans 6:12-14 ESV

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

- › Just as Jesus is held forth as the New Creation. So too are you a new creation in Jesus Christ!

The Uniqueness of the Son of God (v. 17)

The final and perhaps most glorious thing that Matthew shows us in the baptism of Jesus is the utter uniqueness of the Son of God.

Others throughout the Bible have been anointed with God's Spirit. In fact, Israel as a people and the king's of Israel were referred to as "God's son". However, never before has any person been declared directly by the Father as "**my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.**"

For Jesus, he is not *considered* God's son because he is the king. Rather, he is the king because he is the Eternal Son of the Father.

As God's Son Jesus states that he gives the final revelation of God's gracious will and that only the Father knows the Son and only the Son knows the Father.

As the Son of God, Jesus places himself above Abraham, Jonah, Solomon, and the angels because he was in a completely unique relationship to the Father.

Because of this Jesus was able to pronounce people blessed, forgive sins, and demand that his followers lose everything for his sake so that they might gain eternal life.

As the Son of God he is also able to make all who believe in his name the right to become the children of God.

- › This is the final point of application and the conclusion. In your baptism into union with Christ, God proclaims the same thing over you as he proclaimed over Jesus at his baptism: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Because of your union with Christ, you are a child of God and you have the good pleasure of the Father! He welcomes you into His family and to His table. Believe these truths. Believe this more than the accusations of the devil. Sing praises to God for His gracious goodness to us and rejoice as you come to His table this morning!