

Heavens Opened

by Erlo Stegen

Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river is a symbol of humility and repentance, and it is a reminder of the importance of submitting to God's will in our lives.

Scripture: Matthew 3:13

Topics: "Humility", "Confession of Sin"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes the significance of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, a humble and lowly place where Jesus identified with sinners despite being sinless. He highlights the importance of genuine confession and humility, contrasting it with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Stegen urges believers to approach God with true repentance, as only then can they experience the opening of the heavens and the presence of the Holy Spirit. He warns against pride and self-importance, reminding that true elevation comes from humbling oneself before God. The sermon calls for a heartfelt examination of one's life and a sincere commitment to turn away from sin.

Transcript

Summary of sermon by Erlo Stegen, 03 Nov 2013

Matthew 3

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

It's amazing what happened at Jesus' baptism, right at the beginning of His ministry. He went down to the Jordan to be baptised by John.

The Jordan river is not a significant river. It's very lowly. It's a bit like the Tongaat river. Shaka's troops drank from the Tongaat and that's where it got its name. The river became significant because Shaka and his troops drank from it. So too the river Jordan became something because Jesus was baptised there. There is a fashion nowadays among Christians to go to the Jordan river to be baptised, because John baptised Jesus there. But there is nothing fashionable about the baptism of John, a baptism of repentance, where people confessed their sins to be unburdened.

Before Jesus was baptised, John baptised many as they confessed their sins, a baptism of repentance. This is where Jesus went down to before he started his ministry. He was no sinner. Still he went there to be baptised. It's of great significance that when Jesus started His ministry, the first thing He did was to go to this lowly place where people humbled themselves and confessed their sin.

Another instance which shows us how this river was despised was what Naaman the general from Syria said about this river, when comparing it to the rivers in Syria (2Kings 5:12).

Even today the ministry of confession of sins is despised, maybe more than any time before. There are ministers who actively oppose it. They say they have accepted the Lord and doesn't need it, since they're not Catholics. A minister even told me that there's a verse which he hates in the Bible, where people went to John to confess their sins (Matt 3:6). He said he didn't like that idea and it wasn't needed today.

But that is the very place where Jesus started, where people humbled themselves and confessed their sins and were reconciled to God.

The water of baptism cannot remove our sins - it is only a symbol of repentance, pointing to the Precious Blood of the Lord Jesus which wash away our sins.

For us people it's a difficult thing to confess our sin, it's humiliating. Jesus had no sin, the spotless Lamb of God without blemish, but He went there and stood there where you and I should go, taking our place. That is where each one should go and stand in remorse and confession of sin. That is what Jesus did for you and me, taking our sin upon Himself.

How much does that mean to you? How precious is this to you? It should be more precious than anything else in the world, and that should be your topic of conversation continually!

The amazing thing is, as soon as He was baptised, the Heavens opened and the Spirit of God came upon Him in the form of a dove (Matt 3:16). The others would stand there and confess their sins, but with Jesus the heavens opened and the Spirit of God came upon Him.

See how Jesus humbled Himself for you and me! That should be what consumes our life, being the greatest of all to you and me.

We people love to be important and looked up to. But not so with Jesus. He humbled Himself from the beginning of His ministry to the end (Philippians 2:5-8). The Lord Jesus often spoke about humility, but He lived it too and demonstrated it.

He said when you sit at a table to eat, rather take the lowest seat lest you be humbled before all when asked to give your seat to a more honourable person (Luke 14:8-11). He said, humble yourself, deny yourself and be the least.

You will never get anywhere if you are proud and arrogant.

Don't think of yourself as being greater and more important than others. If you think to exalt yourself, rather than getting anywhere you will be humiliated. If you want to start at the top, you won't ever get there. No, humble yourself before God and you will be uplifted (James 4:10; 1Pet 5:6). If you want God to lift you up, you must humble yourself.

There's only one place where you start at the top, and that is digging your own grave.

You will only go down spiritually with grudges and hatred in your life.

Apart from starting where Jesus started, humbling yourself, you won't get anywhere.

There are some who have been baptised, but their baptism have no meaning for they enter the water dirty and exit the same.

John the baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

The pharisees only came to confess their sins because they were caught in the act, and they couldn't do otherwise. But John saw through their hypocrisy and called them a 'brood of vipers' (Matt 3:7). When you confess your sin, part from it and do not go back to it.

When Jesus came to John and Jesus asked to be baptised, John refused saying that he needed to be baptised by Jesus! He realised his unworthiness. There are things even as a mature Christian where things go against the grain. Peter too didn't want Jesus to wash his feet. He felt he was unworthy and he had to wash the feet of the Lord Jesus. John and Peter wasn't in fact wrong in what they said, but Jesus wanted to teach them a lesson.

Likewise, as a mature Christian, you might think a certain direction to be the correct route, yet Jesus shows you differently. Unless you submit to Him, you will have no part in Him. You must have an ear to hear and humble yourself in whatever situation He places you and expects from you. As He said to John, "permit this now to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt 3:15). After John submitted and Jesus was baptised, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God lighted upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

Don't ever see yourself as great, knowing better than the Lord, but submit to His leading, lest you one day find that heaven is closed to you.

Do you know the tears of longing, crying out to God to reveal Himself to you?

Cry to God to work in your life.

Your confession of sin won't help you while you do it deceitfully. Have you cast yourself completely on God? Has the Holy Spirit revealed your sins to you or is your confession from your own heart?

If you confess your sin as a serpent, deceitfully as the pharisees who came to John, it won't help you, you will remain a brood of vipers.

If you truly confess your sin as you ought, you will confess it once and it would be the end of those sins! If you go back to your sins then heaven will remain shut to you.

Do you find that your humbling before God help or not? As we read in Isaiah that humbling yourself deceitfully before God won't help (Isaiah 58:3, 4).

Go and cry to God that He meets with you and reveal your sin to you and confess in truth that it's the end of your sin and you live for God wholeheartedly.

Young and old, examine yourself, before eternity. You may climb the ladder to heaven, confess your sin, but if you confess your sin and go back to it, heaven will still be shut when you reach the top and you will be cast down.

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