

The Baptism of Jesus

by Stewart Ruch

Jesus's baptism is an invitation to join him in his work and to be a fellow worker with God, opening the heavens and fulfilling righteousness.

Duration: 16:59

Scripture: Matthew 3:13

Topics: "Baptism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of every Christian's work in opening the heavens through the ministry of Jesus Christ. He encourages individuals in various professions, such as teachers, students, tradesmen, artists, and musicians, to creatively use their work to serve God's purpose. The speaker refers to the baptism of Jesus as a significant moment where Jesus identifies with sinful humanity and the heavens open up. He highlights the invitation for believers to join Jesus in his work of opening the heavens and encourages them to seek clarity from the Lord regarding their specific assignment in this mission.

Transcript

I've always been someone that has a great interest in the area of leadership, and one of the ways that's manifested in my own curiosity is I've just had a real significant interest in American presidents. I've read a lot of the biographies. I've studied their histories.

I find that leadership is embodied in different people who have led our country, and so that sort of formed in me over the course of really many, many years, a sort of desire, a hope to one day meet a sitting president. I wanted somehow to meet one of the presidents of the United States. You can imagine my absolute delight when, through remarkable circumstances, I got an invitation to a private event where President George W. Bush was going to be speaking alongside some other people from Illinois who were running for national offices.

So I just didn't even know if I'd get anywhere close or what the event was going to be like, but I went ahead and wore my clerical, which is like my black priest shirt. I was a priest then, not a bishop, in my black suit, and I showed up for the event, and I got there really, really early, and so they opened the doors, and you walked in, and it was kind of a ballroom, and there was a sort of cordoned-off area that you could kind of push up there, and then there was a podium, and I assume that's where the president would speak from. So I got right up alongside that cordoned-off area and just stood there for about an hour, hour and a

half, and then several other speakers came, and they spoke, and then they finished up, and there was this incredible moment of anticipation, and out came three or four extraordinarily large men with wires from their ears, going to their back pockets, secret service agents, and they literally stood right alongside the podium like this, and then the President of the United States was announced, and out walked George W. Bush.

He spoke for about 10 minutes, 12 minutes, and I'm thinking, there's got to be some way to meet him. I'm so close, but there's probably a lot of illegal ways to meet him, and those men are very large. How's this going to happen? I'm praying.

I just want to meet a president, and as I guess is often protocol, he comes off the podium when he finishes, and he goes to the line. He's going to shake hands along the line. Now, he started on the far left is where you would normally start.

I was several people in from the far left, but he actually came directly to me, and he leaned over, and he said, I'm so glad you're here. He said, Padre, it means a lot. He said, I need your prayers.

Thank you for being here, and I, you know, I was, you know, I'm thinking, I have to say something to the President of the United States, you know, so he probably thought, I don't know how he got that job. He's a rather inarticulate guy, but he moved on. Okay, now what if when he grabbed my hand, he didn't shook it.

He actually pulled me underneath that quaternary. And what if he leaned over and said, I'm going to wink. Hope you don't mind, Padre, but I need your help today.

Would you mind walking alongside me? And as I shake hands, you pray for each person whose hand I shake. Would you walk right next to me and just help me with my job today? Improbable. Yes, fantastical.

Yeah, absolutely. It didn't happen. The first part did.

Irreconcilable with the image we get of Jesus and the scriptures and the way in which he acts. No, not irreconcilable at all. As a matter of fact, speaking an analogy that is almost precisely in the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ, what he does, one far more powerful, far more famous, far more entitled to the privileges of office than any president of the United States will ever be, comes to one who has no business being asked to join Jesus's work.

John, the baptizer, and he essentially says to him, would you do what you do? You're a baptizer. And would you come alongside me and do my work with me to the degree in which he says righteousness must be fulfilled today by us? Jesus says in his baptism and at the heart of his baptism is an invitation where he says to all of us that would follow him, go to work, go to work, go to work with me. Be my Paul phrases it this way.

Be God's fellow worker. And what we see in the baptism of Jesus is an astonishing moment where Jesus is baptized. He identifies with sinful humanity, though he is without sin and his identification with sinful humanity in that moment.

That moment so pleases the reality and the glory of God that the heavens we are told split wide open. The Holy Spirit descends in power and we hear the presence and the voice of the father say, this is my well beloved son with him. I am well pleased in that most momentous of occasions, that foreshadowing of what the cross will be when Jesus ultimately and fully identifies with sinful humanity.

In that moment, Jesus reaches across the cordoned area and he pulls somebody right to him. John, the baptizer and says, come with me and do my work. That is one of the great gifts of the baptism of Christ is the invitation to join Jesus as he opens the heavens.

So turning your bulletin to our passage, please, I want to talk about two things this morning that we see in this passage. First is a call to go to work. And secondly, what is it that prevents us from going to work? There's a call to go to work, to go to the work of opening the heavens.

But it's also we see, as John says, or as Matthew says about John, he would be prevented from doing so. Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, the baptized by him. John was a figure not sanctioned or carrying any official office where there were many offices that could be carried within the religious system of Israel.

He is baptizing, which is not at that time necessarily a normal function. Israelites would have known it. It was part of an Israelite process to becoming an Israelite, but it wasn't widespread.

So he's innovating on a on a sort of understood practice. And what he's doing in his baptism is he's doing it for cleansing. He's saying to people there is one greater than me that is coming.

And when this one comes, you want to be ready in your heart. You want to be ready by being cleansed, by being purified, by repenting of your sin. So Jesus, Jesus comes to John as he is doing this baptism for repentance.

And we read it to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him. Verse 14 saying, I need to be baptized by you.

And do you come to me? I don't I don't understand. Why would you ever involve me? Why would you ever include me? What is it that you're doing right now? I think I know who you are. John said, there goes the Lamb of God and another part of the Bible.

What's happening here? There is an invitation to John the Baptist and there's an invitation to every Christian. To be a fellow worker with Jesus in the opening of the heavens, the work that Christ has come to do. Jesus in his baptism invites a human being.

He identifies with humanity in their sin, while Jesus is without sin. And yet in doing so, he identifies so profoundly. He not only steps into the baptism that sinners need and he does not, but he actually includes a sinful human being in baptizing him.

And then he makes this most remarkable statement. Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us emphasis on us to fulfill all righteousness. Righteousness would be the way of God to fulfill the way of God, to to align our lives with the design of God for the living of life.

That's righteousness. So this needs to be done by us. Now, the US could refer to a kind of divine.

We Jesus is referring to us, the father and the spirit who will be manifested and revealed in just a moment. So that could be the US. I think that's a very plausible interpretation, but it's also very possible in his conversation with John, where there's a one on one going on that the US also includes John.

And maybe it's both. Maybe what he's saying is I will bring you into my life and my life is lived in the very life of the Trinity. Nothing less than an invitation to sinners who will be cleansed and repented.

Nothing less than an invitation to come into the life of Christ, which is a life he lives in the fullness of the Trinity, the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. And that is the heart of being a fellow worker with God. We are invited into that reality.

Now, what's that work? That work is Jesus's work of opening the heavens. And that's what we do with our lives. That's what you do with your work.

You're a mother, you're a father. Your first work is to open the heavens. Your first work is to live by the cross of Christ and the work of repentance and to open the heavens and to build a family culture to the Holy Spirit descends in power and the father speaks in his presence.

That's your work. You're in the marketplace. You're a teacher.

You're a student. You're a tradesman. You're in the social sciences.

You're an artist. You're a musician. You're building a small business.

Whatever your work is, every single Christian has the work of opening the heavens in the ministry of Jesus Christ. That's the number one goal. If you think about your year and how you're going to serve your family as a mother, if you think about your business or the people that you serve in a corporation or the practice that you have as an attorney, whatever it might be, your number one goal, your number one most important thing that you need to do with your work next year is how is it creatively, how is it by the power of the spirit that I am used by God to open up the heavens and nothing less is the work of every Christian.

That's what you're invited into. That's the call of God upon Christians. I still don't get it.

You're saying I still don't know how I open up the heavens. I couldn't prescribe for you as your pastor exactly what that means. That's the work for you to do with the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

That's the creative work for you to do to figure out what does it mean in my particular line of work that I'm called to open up the heavens. How does that affect my relational evangelism? How does that affect the goals that I set? How does that affect how I understand creating jobs for the ennobling of people who don't have jobs, whatever it might be? Do the creative hard work of understanding that because you have been invited to go to opening up the heavens work, but you would be prevented. John said to Jesus, I don't want to be prevented from him.

What prevents us from this work? What prevents us from engaging and being fellow workers with God? First, I would say there's a kind of spiritually defended passivity that can prevent us. Here's what I mean by spiritually defended passivity. I had a season in my life where I lived quite a bit of legalism.

So I lived by legalism. I wanted to be a faithful Christian and I embraced legalism. And then in the midst of that, I sort of swung and I swung.

I overcompensated. And then I wanted to live as I would put it by grace. And I put that in quotes because I had a certain idea of what grace meant, what I meant by living by grace.

It meant that God was so utterly sovereign, which he is and so great and sort of greater than any and so above all things and so powerful that he needed nothing from me. I had nothing to contribute. I had nothing in me that was any good.

I understood I was a sinner, but there was nothing. I was decimated as a person. And so I had nothing to contribute.

I had nothing to do. Basically, my life was a matter of living by grace, which meant I took a passive observational perspective on the kingdom of God while God did absolutely everything. And it sounded right at first, but it led to a life of absolute disengagement.

It affected my moral life. It affected my engaged kingdom life, affected my service, but it was spiritually defended, but it was actually passivity. As I began to read the Bible, I began to realize, wait a second, there's words like fellow worker there.

There are moments like Jesus saying to John, I must be baptized by you there. There's actually this profound invitation. There's this phrase that Peter uses partaking of the divine nature that I have to take in the presence and the person of God supposed to engage.

I can't sit here passive any longer. That's one way in which we're prevented. And we can build a whole theology and spiritual perspective to defend us from actually responding to Jesus, who says to John, I must be baptized by you.

But there is also a kind of over spiritualized perspective. And this is where we say that the spiritual, i.e., the overtly religious is first in God's heart and mind and the secular, i.e., those who work out in the world are important, but secondary in God's mind and economy. And thereby I don't engage or I engage in my work, but my work is separate from my life as a Christian.

I have an overly spiritualized and in a tradition like ours, we can exacerbate that because I'm up here on the chancel stage and you're down there. Not many of you are wearing this this morning. Is there anybody wearing this? I should probably know that, right? You're not wearing this.

You don't you don't wear Ratchet and Shamir and preaching scarf. You don't you don't wear that. So you go, hey, Stuart does his deal.

I do my deal. And in part, I feel kind of bad because he gets to do his deal and I'm secondary. But in part, I'm off the hook.

And in a way, actually, the spiritual people, they don't understand us. And so we kind of bond is us. And I guess they have their bonding is them.

And we have this us them. And you actually miss the invitation. You actually don't understand that Jesus is saying, no, no, no, no, no, no.

You're a student. That's kingdom work. You engage in manufacturing.

That's kingdom work. And do it in a way that opens up the heavens. It speaks to my cross and my father and my Holy Spirit.

I have an older friend, worked in the marketplace, ran his own company and got a account with some folks in Saudi Arabia. And so he began to do as he traveled to Saudi Arabia because he understood that he'd been given a kingdom assignment and work from the Lord to do the marketplaces. He would just bring deflated soccer balls and he would meet with his clients and they would invite them to the house.

They go to restaurants and he would bring a soccer ball and he was to say, I like to give this to your children. And inevitably, the Saudi Arabian would say, well, thank you. Why would you bring a gift to my children? He would say without any smirk or embarrassment or cheesiness about it, just to say, oh, I'm a Christian and I live by a gift given me by God, the father in Jesus Christ.

And I like to do what God does. So I give gifts as he gave me a great gift, opened up the heavens at that point. Integrated his calling in his work, go work on that.

Get really clear from the Lord what your particular opening of the heavens assignment is. Push against the passivity, push against over spiritualized perspective. And let the Lord speak to you, for he has gone to the cross, he has opened the heavens and he has said to us, join me in this work in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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