

“With You God Is Well-Pleased”

(Luke 3:21-22)

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“²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”

Introduction: There Are Many Ways to Approach Life

- A. In the multitude of ways in which you strive by your own standard or righteousness OR by approaching life in accord with God’s standard and righteousness.
- B. If we choose *our* standard or righteousness, we enter into a sinful maze that leads to disaster as we try to follow the vast-array of “god-substitutes”: (from Keller’s *The Reason for God*, 290-291)
 - 1. If you center your life and identity on your spouse or partner, you will be emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. The other person’s problems will be overwhelming to you.
 - 2. If you center your life and identity on your family and children, you will try to live your life through your

children until they resent you or have no self of their own. At worst, you may abuse them when they displease you.

- 3. If you center your life and identity on your work and career, you will be a driven workaholic and a boring, shallow person. At worst you will lose family and friends and, if your career goes poorly, develop deep depression.
- 4. If you center your life and identity on money and possessions, you’ll be eaten up by worry or jealousy about money. You’ll be willing to do unethical things to maintain your lifestyle, which will eventually blow up your life.
- 5. If you center your life and identity on pleasure, gratification, and comfort, you will find yourself getting addicted to something. You will become chained to the “escape strategies” by which you avoid the hardness of life.
- 6. If you center your life and identity on relationships and approval, you will be constantly overly hurt by criticism and thus always losing friends. You will fear confronting others and therefore will be a useless friend.
- 7. If you center your life and identity on a “noble cause,” you will divide the world into “good” and “bad” and demonize your opponents. Ironically, you will be

controlled by your enemies. Without them, you have no purpose.

8. If you center your life and identity on religion and morality, you will, if you are living up to your moral standards, be proud, self-righteous, and cruel. If you don't live up to your standards, your guilt will be utterly devastating.

OR you can put all of the man-made systems of righteousness aside and go with God's plan...

- C. But here's the rub (the impossible challenge in one respect at least), *God's* plan is the "righteousness of God."
 1. This teaching in God's Word has multiple facets. It has the facet of God's saving righteousness, esp. as we know it in St. Paul's "righteousness of God (Rom 21f.)," but it is a concept that is also alongside of God's justice. (Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume II, 195-197)
 2. It had a very precise sense, however, when in a parallel to our Gospel in Luke 3 this morning – in Matthew 3 – Jesus said as he approached John the Baptist (who is practically beside himself and aghast at the idea that Jesus would come to him for baptism):

Matthew 3:15: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

- D. At Jesus' baptism Jesus is touching on that aspect of the "righteousness of God" that expresses itself in "the right conduct of man which follows the will of God and is pleasing to Him, for rectitude of life before God, for uprightness before His judgment. (Kittel, 198)"
- E. In other words, "the righteousness of God" includes the idea of doing what is pleasing to God.
- F. And at this juncture in which the righteousness of God might be isolated in accord with this biblical and legitimate definition, we find ourselves still in a mess.
 1. All of the man-made systems of righteousness only lead to satanic confusion and sinful addictions, so we try to do the right thing and turn to God's way...
 2. That is, the effort to do what is pleasing to God; to live in the righteousness of God.
 - a. We try to think the right way, but our thoughts betray God's righteousness.
 - b. We try to desire the right things, but our hearts are found to be corrupt in light of God's righteousness.

- c. We try to commit ourselves to right ways, but our sin keeps rearing its ugly head, and we fail in accord with the standard of God's righteousness.
- d. God knows how His righteousness in our lives should be expressed: we should love Him with all of our hearts (with all that we desire); with all of our souls (with all that we commit to); and with all our minds (with all that we permit to characterize our thought-lives), but we fall-short. In sin, we love ourselves more than God...our own desires, our own commitments, and our own thought-lives betray God...for all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Ro 3:23).

Part 1: All of These Reasons Are Why Jesus' Baptism Was Vital for Our Being Rescued from These Terrible Circumstances!

- A. Remember I said that John the Baptist was beside himself and aghast at the idea of Jesus coming to him to be baptized.
- B. Let's be perfectly clear about what John the Baptist was doing when Jesus approached him: John was administering a sacrament of repentance in his

baptism. Please understand what his baptism was therefore about:

- 1. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance to the forgiveness of sins (3:3).
- 2. John's baptism was connected to his preaching on the coming wrath of God (3:7-9, 16-17).
- 3. John's baptism was associated that the sin of sinners would be burned in an unquenchable fire (3:17).

- C. For these reasons, John completely objects to Jesus coming to him to be baptized:

Matthew 3:14: "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'"

- 1. Jesus is the pure and sinless "Lamb of God" that John himself had proclaimed (John 1:29 & 36).
 - a. The lamb was a clean sacrifice; Jesus was the ultimate Lamb and absolutely clean without blemish, without sin.
 - b. In fact, for being the sinless Son of God, *He* was the One to forgive the sins of all others!
 - c. So, how could Jesus possibly come to a baptism for repentance from sin and for the forgiveness of sins?!

- d. Jesus had no sin to repent of. Jesus had no sin to be forgiven.
- e. What is more, this baptism was connected to John's preaching of coming wrath, but this coming wrath is for sinners. The pure and spotless Christ could never be a recipient of God's wrath!
- f. And still what is more the purifying work of God towards sin is to put that sin in unquenchable fire...this destructive sense of fire in Scripture – though in other contexts fire may have a purifying sense – this destructive sense could never be applied to the Lamb of God!

2. For all of these reasons, John is shocked and amazed...how can Jesus come to be baptized?!

D. The key, however, is the fact that in going back to Matthew 3:15, Jesus' interest is to be baptized in order to ***“fulfill all righteousness.”***

Part 2: The Saving Gospel Cannot Be Understood Apart From Christ's Baptism:

A. That is, by coming in this way as to “fulfill all righteousness” Jesus came to affirm His identity with you, the one who can never fulfill God's righteousness.

- B. He conducts Himself as one who needs forgiving like you do, but since He is perfect and sinless He is able in your place and in your stead able to keep the righteousness of God.
- C. So God's solution really is your solution to life...because it is a solution where Christ enters your life, takes your place, and provides for you HIS perfect righteousness.
- D. All of Christ's life – as of His baptism for you – was and is counted as your life!
- E. His life is your life!
- F. But you say, what of your sin that must be punished...that too was a reason that the Lord entered your life by being baptized: so that you would not suffer the fire of your sin.
- G. Just: *“Along with the Spirit, in a sense the fire of God's wrath (Lk 3:17) is also placed on Jesus at his baptism, because Jesus is baptized with the baptism intended for sinners who need repentance and cleansing. (Concordia Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:50, 139).”*
- H. That fire would come to its consummation when this inaugural entrance into Jesus' saving ministry for you at his baptism would conclude three-years later on the cross of Calvary. The water of John's baptism for Jesus led Jesus to suffer the fire of God's wrath for your sins when He died on the cross.

- I. Just: "Jesus takes the place of sinners and begins his public ministry as the Lamb of God, the bearer of the world's sins."

Conclusion: For this Saving Ministry the Father was and is Pleased:

- A. In response to His Son's perfect fulfillment of all that God's righteousness demands, God the Father is pleased!
- B. And the Father spoke it at this first Trinitarian baptism which established your baptism. The Father said,

Luke 3:22: *"and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"*

- C. But someone will ask, "But since Jesus and the Father are one, haven't they loved each other from eternity and have always been pleased with each other from eternity?!"
- D. Yes of course, but now the Heavenly Father spoke from the perspective of His One and Only Son being loved – not in the sense of an affection love – but in the sense of fully acknowledging this sacrificial offering that the Son was engaging in for the salvation of sinners...the

Father is saying I love you as you are about to willingly take upon yourself the foulness of sin so as to remove the filth of all sin...I love you as my Son who is going to sacrifice Himself for sinners...who is obedient also to my righteousness which includes having mercy and grace for helpless sinners. I am pleased with you also in the sense dear Son that I will accept your perfect fulfillment in your life of my holy Law and I will accept your perfect payment for all sin as you spill your blood for all of these my people!

- E. And the fact is that everything that Jesus was and did is for YOU dear Christian. Therefore, YOU are beloved of the Father since the Father called Jesus "beloved," God is well-pleased with YOU since He proclaimed that He was and is well-pleased with Jesus.
- F. Christ's baptism is proof that this is true, because on that day He joined Himself to you. Your baptism into Christ is proof also, because on that day you were joined to Christ.
- G. Jesus was baptized, so behold the right way for life: in Christ, God is well-pleased with you!