

Not What You Would Expect

¹³ 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 alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

If you know John the Baptist’s life up to this point in our text in Matthew 3, none of Jesus’ life would have surprised John the Baptist all that much. Neither necessarily looked or dressed their part. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; Jesus, the Messiah himself, was wrapped in swaddling clothes and born in a manger. John preached in the wilderness; Jesus came from Nazareth. John had the lowly diet of locusts and wild honey; Jesus lived the lowly life of a carpenter’s son. John the Baptist knew exactly what he was called to do, to prepare people for the Lord, to make straight paths for him; and Jesus knew exactly what he was called to do, to save the people from their sins.

But when Jesus walked into the Jordan River to be baptized by John, John could not have and would not have expected such a thing. Listen to John’s shock: **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”** Reading between those lines, you can hear John thinking to himself, “What are you doing in this river Jesus?!?! I am the one who needs to be baptized by you! I’m the sinful human being! You are the holy Son of God! And you have come here to be baptized by me?!?! Seriously?!?!” Totally unexpected! And it’s not hard to imagine John’s shock, because what sinful human being in their right mind would ever expect to baptize the Son of God? Certainly not John. John had even said, prior to our text, **“One more powerful than I is coming, whose sandals I am not fit to carry”** (Matthew 3:11). So you see John’s dilemma. Baptism is for sinners, and here he was the holy Son of God standing in front of him in the Jordan River to be baptized. Totally unexpected!

So why would Jesus come to John like that? Why is Jesus standing in that river to be baptized? Jesus’ answer is short, simple, and sweet but profound: **“Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness’”** (Matthew 3:15). Every word in Jesus’ answer has meaning.

First, Jesus says: **“Let it be so now.”** That expression emphasizes three things:

- 1) It emphasizes a concession to John. It’s Jesus’ way of saying to John, “You’re right, John. This is unexpected and does seem backwards. But for the sake of sinners and for the sake of salvation, this baptism has to take place. Let it be so now.”

- 2) That expression also emphasizes God the Father's will for Jesus to be our substitute, to stand in the place of sinners, to be our sin-bearer.
- 3) Finally "let it be so now" emphasizes Jesus' own willingness to do his heavenly Father's will. That willingness on Jesus' part is really something to ponder. Jesus, the only Son of God, is so far above us, and yet he willingly humbles himself to become sin for us.

Many of you might be familiar with the description of Jesus in Isaiah 53 where it says in verse 12, **"He was numbered among the transgressors."** That statement not only refers to when Jesus hung on the cross, but it also refers to when he stood in the Jordan River with sinners. Dear friends, Jesus loves you so much that he got in the line of sinners at the Jordan River to be numbered with you, to take your place, all for the sake of your salvation. Yes, totally unexpected! But aren't you glad? Aren't you thankful? Aren't you in awe of such love?

Now focus on Jesus' last words in verse 15: **"It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."** That word "proper" literally means that "it is appropriate to do this." In other words, as inappropriate as it seemed to John the Baptist that he, a sinful human being, would baptize, Jesus, the sinless Son of God, it was totally appropriate to Jesus. This is what needed to be done to save the people from their sins. This is what needed to be done for the forgiveness of sins. This is what needed to be done for righteousness' sake. The apostle Paul states this clearly in II Corinthians 5:21: **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."**

By the way, if you look at verse 17, Jesus' baptism was also appropriate to the Father in heaven, who said, **"This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased."** And why was it appropriate? Listen to these words again: **"To fulfill all righteousness."**

As unexpected as Jesus' baptism seems, consider why it was absolutely necessary **"to fulfill all righteousness."** Ask yourself this question: "Can you fulfill all righteousness? Can you live up to the standard of righteousness that God demands, expects, and deserves from you?" Putting it another way, "Do you honestly think you can do enough to make things right with God for all the wrong you have done? Do you really believe that any good you claim to have done is good enough to satisfy the righteousness of your holy God?" The obvious answer to those questions tells you why Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness in your place. It tells you why he was standing in the Jordan River in a line of sinners to be baptized. He was there for you.

Now do you want to hear something really unexpected? In many ways, the approval that the Father gave his Son at his baptism is similar to the approval that the Father gave to you when you were baptized. As the Father said of his Son, Jesus, **"This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased,"** in essence, the Father said the same of you when you were baptized. When you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Father gave his approval of you, saying, **"You my son, whom I love (you are my daughter, whom I love); with you I am well pleased."** There are so many, beautiful, powerful gospel statements that give you comfort and strength – redemption, forgiveness, peace. By the grace and power of your baptism,

add this one to your list – APPROVAL. You are approved by God the Father as his own dear child, whom he loves and with whom he is perfectly pleased.

But do not lose sight of this humbling fact: God does not give you his approval at your baptism if he does not give approval of his Son at his baptism. You are not clothed with Christ's righteousness in your baptism if Jesus does not fulfill all righteousness. So is Jesus' baptism totally unexpected? Yes. But it was absolutely necessary for you and me.

If, on your own, you had to imagine what the Savior of the world would be like, would you have expected him to be born in a manger? Would you have expected him to ride a donkey into Jerusalem? Would you have expected him to be crucified on a cross? No, you wouldn't have, nor would you have expected him to be baptized in the Jordan River. But all that you wouldn't have expected of the Savior of the world, even his baptism, is exactly whom he needed to be and what he needed to do for your salvation. Why? So that John the Baptist, after Jesus' baptism, could point to Jesus and say, **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). So no, Jesus' baptism is not what you or I or even John the Baptist would have expected. But now that you know the truth of Jesus' baptism, now that you know why he stood in that Jordan River, now that you know he stood in that Jordan River for you, wouldn't you agree that it is far, far better than you would have expected? Me too. Amen.