



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 3:13-17

Topic

Jesus travels from Nazareth 60 miles south to the Jordan River where John at first tries to prevent Him from being baptized

Title

"The Southern Baptist's Contention"

Introduction

Who recognizes the catch-phrase, "I love it when a plan comes together"?

It's from television's, *The A Team*. Colonel John "Hannibal" Smith said it all the time.

I don't mean to trivialize the monumental event of Jesus' baptism, but you could say of it that **a plan was coming together**. It was a plan at least six thousand years of human history in the making, not counting what had been determined in eternity past before the creation of the world.

God's plan to save mankind from sin was coming together as Jesus Christ stepped into the Jordan River. Submitting as He did to the baptism of John was His way of letting His Father in Heaven know that He was ready to walk the road to Calvary.

God the Father responded in a way that let Jesus know He would be spiritually supplied to accomplish what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had planned.

I'll organize my thoughts about the baptism of Jesus around two points: #1 Look Closely & You'll See Jesus Submitting To Our Father, and #2 Listen Carefully & You'll Hear Our Father Supplying Jesus.

#1 Look Closely & You'll See Jesus Submitting To Our Father

(v13-15)

I think it is important we remember that what is commonly called 'Christianity' is not a Jesus-come-lately religion that started in the first century. In the Garden of Eden, at the very beginning of human history, God promised Adam and Eve He would come Himself as a man in order to redeem what they had forfeited through sin.

At His baptism the plan of God was *game-on!* for Jesus.

Mat 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

"Then" was right after John had said the Messiah was coming. Jesus is being identified as that Person.

"Galilee" was about sixty miles from where John was baptizing. It wasn't a day trip; it required real effort on the part of Jesus.

Jesus went to John just like every other Jew. No one being baptized would have known Him or recognized Him. Can you imagine the Son of God standing in line?

John recognized Him.

Mat 3:14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

John had some history with Jesus. John was Jesus' cousin so we can assume he would know Him by sight.

But he knew something more about Jesus. He knew that Jesus was by far holier than he was. One way he knew of Jesus' holiness was by the agency of the Holy Spirit. When John was still in his mother's womb, Mary came to visit Elizabeth and we're told John leaped inside Elizabeth's womb.

John was a prenatal Pentecostal!

Besides what the Holy Spirit told him, John undoubtedly had heard, from his mom and dad, the account of Aunt Mary being with child by the Holy Spirit. He was probably aware of the events of Matthew chapters one and two regarding the visit of the magi to the young Jesus and the subsequent flight into Egypt to avoid being murdered by Herod.

It's even possible Jesus and John had hung out at family functions. We know, for example, that Jesus was taken to the Temple when He was twelve and got left behind by Joseph and Mary, not from neglect, but because they supposed He was with other family.

It would seem he understood that Jesus was, in fact, Messiah and King and it therefore troubled him as to exactly why Jesus would come forward to submit to the baptism of repentance. It seemed wrong.

Mat 3:15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

Jesus gave John one reason for getting baptized by John. It was "to fulfill all righteousness." "Righteousness" refers to keeping God's written Law and obeying what God might require of Jews at any particular time, especially as revealed by a prophet. Baptism was not a requirement under the Law, but God had sent John to baptize in the spirit and power of Elijah, in preparation for the Messiah, and it was definitely a requirement for believing Jews.

It wasn't required per se for Jesus, but He said it was "fitting" for Him, meaning it was something He ought to do; it was the right thing to do.

By being baptized along with the other Jews, Jesus was identifying with them; He was taking His place among them. He Who had no sin to repent of took His place among those who had sin to repent of. He Who was sinless identified Himself with sinners.

By submitting to John's baptism Jesus was submitting to the plan of God to save mankind. That plan, which we know as the Gospel, was for God to become a man and, as the unique God-man, live a sinless life then die on the Cross for the sins of all mankind as their representative and substitute.

In Second Corinthians 5:21 you read that God, "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." What the Father would do spiritually, on the Cross, is illustrated by Jesus submitting to John's baptism.

There are a few other things that were accomplished by Jesus' baptism by John:

1. As we will see in the next two verses, His baptism afforded Our Father the opportunity to supply Jesus for His ministry.
2. His baptism marked the official beginning of His ministry.
3. By submitting Himself to John, Jesus gave approval to John's ministry.
4. By being baptized Jesus was predicting the Cross and the empty tomb, because (as we will see in verses sixteen and seventeen) baptism is a figure of death and resurrection.

Thank you, Jesus, for submitting to John's baptism - and for thereby submitting to the Cross upon which you saved us!

The submission of Jesus Christ ought to humble us. When you think of Him leaving Heaven, taking on a human body, living in an undesirable place, relegated to obscurity for thirty years.

I mean, Jesus created the universe and is called upon by His Father to *learn* carpentry in Nazareth?

Ultimately He submitted to the Cross. Yes, His submission should humble us. But too often submission **stumbles** us. We don't like to submit; we have all kinds of reasons why we can't or shouldn't.

I don't know where you might be stumbled by God asking you to submit - whether it is at home or at work or in the church. It seems as though some folks are stumbled at home, does it not. as you hear of Christians divorcing who have no grounds for it?

Since Jesus submitted supremely, so can we.

#2 Listen Carefully & You'll Hear Our Father Supplying Jesus

(v16-17)

John had already baptized multiplied thousands of people. But when he baptized Jesus, something stunning happened.

Mat 3:16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.

"The heavens were opened" doesn't just mean the clouds parted and it was a sunny day. There is an indication of seeing through our stellar heavens and into Heaven itself. It's like when, in the book of Acts, Stephen sees into Heaven while he's being martyred.

We can't say how much of Heaven John and Jesus saw. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus "saw the Spirit of God descending."

We know from John's Gospel that John the Baptist also saw the Holy Spirit descending. It was, in fact, a sign he was told to look for that would positively identify the One who was the Messiah.

I think John suspected it was Jesus but he could not be certain until the Holy Spirit came upon Him.

I get the impression, don't you, that neither Jesus nor John had any idea that this was how God was going to introduce Jesus as Messiah. It's clear they hadn't met to discuss exactly how they were going to go about baptizing Jesus. One day the Holy Spirit stirred Jesus to go to the Jordan to be baptized. John almost ruined the moment and had to be convinced it was necessary.

We must, must, must remain sensitive to the stirrings, to the promptings, to the leadings, of the Holy Spirit if we are to accomplish spiritual service. God is going to ask us to do things, to go places, to say things, that are not exactly the way we would do it. Otherwise we would be able to bast about our own brilliant plans.

The "dove" is so common a symbol of the Holy Spirit to us that we fail to discover that this is **the very first time** in the Scriptures, and **the only time**, He appears in the form of a dove.

Commentators suggest many interesting and even insightful reasons why He would appear as a dove. Probably the most important has to do with what Jews would have thought once they heard that the dove had descended upon Jesus.

They would recall the very first time, in the Scriptures, that a dove is mentioned. It was when Noah was still on the ark riding out the flood waters of God's judgment against sin. He sent out a dove and when that dove descended back upon the ark, with an olive branch in its mouth, it meant the waters of God's judgment had receded and that God was again seeking peace with mankind.

The apostle Peter, in his second letter, compares the waters of Noah's flood to the waters of baptism. He says of Noah "he was saved by water," literally *through* the water; then Peter references baptism.

1Pe 3:20 ... when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

1Pe 3:21 There is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Peter clearly states that water baptism itself is only a type; it does not and cannot save us. He is quick to say it's not baptism, it's "the answer of a good conscience toward God," meaning it's something *internal* not *external*. Yet there are groups that erroneously insist you must be water baptized to be saved.

A Jew wouldn't have had this confusion or come to that conclusion. They would have heard about the "dove" and immediately thought of Noah and the flood. That was the last time in their Scriptures that a dove had alighted upon someone coming out of flood waters.

They would have looked upon Jesus, upon Whom the dove descended, and wondered how could He be an 'ark' that could save them from the waters of God's judgment? How could He bring them an olive branch of peace from God?

The answers to those questions would be given as they watched Jesus over the next three and one half years - especially as they watched Him on the Cross. There, on Calvary, the flood waters of God's judgment would roll over Him for their sake. There God the Father would make peace with mankind.

Jesus talked about the Cross as if it were a flood-like baptism. Speaking about His dying on the Cross, Jesus said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50).

The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and He alighted upon Him. He came and He stayed.

Jesus was born by the agency of the Holy Spirit - formed as He was in Mary's womb. He was filled with the Holy Spirit throughout His life up to that point. The Holy Spirit coming upon Him, and remaining, is a new and different relationship with the Holy Spirit. It was a anointing, an empowering, for His ministry.

In Isaiah 11:2 we read of the Messiah,

Isa 11:2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

Jesus will later quote this passage and say that it is about Him. Jesus would be abundantly supplied by God to carry out His mission.

As we get further into Jesus' ministry we are going to see He had very little in terms of earthly resources. He had no house of His own. His followers had to glean in the fields in order to eat some days. What little money they were given as offerings was being embezzled by Judas.

You don't even think about those things because of the super-abundant supply He was given by the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus, Who was born of the Spirit and Who was filled with the Spirit, needed the Holy Spirit to come upon Him in order to anoint and empower Him to serve God, then doesn't it stand to reason we do, too?

And if Jesus is our example, shouldn't we who are born again by the Holy Spirit, and are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit, be subsequently baptized with Him, having Him come upon us? Yep!

Theologians are great at minimizing things to fit their systematic conclusions. Most of the commentaries you read immediately argue that, the moment you get saved, you've got all the Holy Spirit you are ever going to get. Further, they tell you it's up to you to remain filled with the Holy Spirit.

Look, if Jesus needed the Holy Spirit to come upon Him; and if He told His followers, after His ascension into Heaven, to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them; then **we** need the Holy Spirit to come upon **us**.

We should spend less time explaining away our need and seeking His empowering.

Mat 3:17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit. God is One God but three Persons in a relationship we cannot fathom.

God's "voice" brings together two things He said in the past, in the Bible, about the Messiah.

- In Psalm 2:7 we read, "The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'"
- In Isaiah 42:1 we read, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him..."

The passage from psalms describes the majesty, the glory, the sovereignty of the Messiah as King. This was the way Jews thought about their coming King.

The passage from Isaiah describes the Messiah as the suffering servant. It was confusing to the Jews, so they assumed God was talking about Israel, the nation, in their suffering, and not their coming King.

Jesus was both of these. He came first to suffer for our sins in order to reign forever. After His death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven, the apostles made clear, in their preaching, that these two things came together in Jesus Christ.

Our Father's statement that He was "well pleased" with Jesus tells us that Jesus lived a sinless life. It is like a background check, letting us know that He had reviewed every moment, every thought, and found that Jesus was sinless. It lets us know He can properly represent us as our substitute. He qualifies for His mission to die in our place; His death can be applied to us. As one commentator put it, "the *value* of His dying depends upon the *virtue* of His living."

God's eternal plan was coming together on the banks of the Jordan. It was definitely *not* how anyone expected the Messiah, the King, to be introduced. But it was the only way He could be introduced to sinners. He had to first identify with us, take His place among us, if He was going to save us.

One more thing about Jews and doves. The dove was a sacrificial animal approved for use by the poorest of worshippers. Those who could not afford a lamb brought a dove.

In Jesus Christ we see Deity submitting to be the sacrifice for sin for the poorest, most impoverished, most beggarly, of sinners on the earth.

In other words, **for you and I.**

