

Baptism

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, everyone. It is truly a joy to see you all here. Hope you've been reminded already today just how special a thing it is for God's people to meet together.
- And in these uncertain times, uncharted territory for all of us, let's remind ourselves who our God is. Let me just take this opportunity to speak about our services kind of going on from here on in, particularly maybe about today.
- Let me just encourage you to follow all the guidelines that the government have published practically to do. So things like hand washing and let's be careful about touching and the things that we're doing as we meet together today.
- It's just common sense, a lot of it's just wisdom. But let me encourage you to think on it as loving our neighbor. We've been thinking over the last while as we've kind of journeyed through the Genesis series about how all life matters to God.
- And every human being is made wonderfully in his image. And it's a wonderful chance we have at the minute to practically demonstrate that we believe that that is true by caring for the most vulnerable in our society.
- [1 : 0 6] So let me just encourage you to do that stuff. You'll be looking around and seeing there's a lot of people not here today. Let me again encourage you to be phoning them and checking in with them. It's a way that we can practically love one another.
- Over the next little while, we may be going to have to get good at being involved in one another's lives creatively. So let's encourage one another to be thinking about who we can be checking up on and phoning. It's a great chance. We just need to get good at praying together on the phone.
- It's weird to start with, but when you've done it once or twice, it's a wonderful thing to do. So let's be doing that. Tonight, we're going to be particularly thinking about our government. Now, we penciled in this series maybe about six months ago, thinking biblically about government.
- And we're going to be particularly praying for our nation. And you can see that the God's sovereign hand is in this. We had absolutely no idea. But that's what we're going to be doing tonight, thinking about that stuff. I'm going to be praying particularly for our government and our health service tonight.
- So if you can and you want to come along tonight, if not, then let me encourage you just to pray in your own time for these things. We'll be doing that about seven o'clock. So maybe that's the time when you want to start doing that.
- [2 : 1 0] We can do it collectively. So that is today. Looking ahead. We're very conscious that stuff has progressed so fastly this week. And so we're putting in plans in place with maybe the expectation that it'll be very difficult for us to meet publicly as of next Sunday.
- So let me encourage you to keep your eyes on the website and your emails. Give us your email address if you want to be kept in the loop. On Twitter and Facebook and things like that. We'll be thinking creatively about ways that we can continue to be involved in one another's lives and meet together, as it were, on the Internet.

Because there's so many great advances in technology that we can do that these days. So just keep your eyes abreast for developments as the week goes. And again, let's just be in much prayer for our nation at this time.

But perhaps the most important thing to say is that I was reminded this morning that in the storm, it is always good to be near the one who has got the power over the wind and the waves.

And so we're going to turn to think about him now for just a little short time as we come to think about Jesus Christ. As you remember, in John's Gospel, John 11, we see he's the one who cries over his friend Lazarus.

[3 : 26] So our God's not immune to this suffering and pain. But Jesus is the one who said, I am the resurrection and the life and said, Lazarus, come out. And he is the one that holds our lives in his hands.

And so it's to him we want to turn now. So let me encourage you to come with me to Matthew chapter 3. And you might want to have one finger in your Bibles in Isaiah chapter 53 as well.

We're going to be dipping in and out of these two. Well, particularly Matthew 3, these two scriptures today. We're continuing on in this little series, looking at the key moments in Jesus's life.

And we've hit Jesus's baptism today. Now, we have all sorts of different ways in our culture of identifying ourselves with things.

Let me just give you, as I've walked around this week, let me just give you three examples I've seen of people identifying themselves with things. The first one came at the end of last Sunday. And my family and I were outside.

[4 : 23] We're walking up the hill towards the car. And we're very conscious that there's a lot of people wearing blue and white walking down the hill towards Murrayfield. And they had a good afternoon, didn't they?

We did okay last weekend. People identifying themselves with a sports team, a nation. Second was I was walking around Edinburgh University as well and bumped into people who were wearing blue and pink, I think was the colors that they were wearing.

Standing on the street corner together as one, encouraging passers-by drivers to honk for their cause. And they were rallying together for pensions.

That's what they were doing. They were rallying together for a cause. And I guess the third one is I was walking up the street just here, and you maybe need notice if you do this. The house in the corner has got a big yellow sign in its window with black writing saying yes.

And nobody's looking at that thinking, I wonder which way those guys are going to vote for us to do it again. They're identifying themselves with a political party. So we've got all sorts of ways, don't we, in our culture of identifying ourselves with things.

[5 : 30] And you guys will have them in your own lives as well. And the thing about this passage today is that we're going to see Jesus identify himself with something.

Jesus, God in the flesh, remember who he is, God come down. He's going to identify himself with something. And that's huge when we think about it.

And so here is the scene of Jesus' life recorded by this guy called Matthew, who is a fascinating character, really. So Matthew is a Jewish boy who grows up to be a tax collector.

He spends his life working for the Romans, collecting taxes from his own people, the Jews. But Jesus comes to him, and we get this encounter in Matthew's gospel later on, where Jesus comes up to him and says, Matthew, come and follow me.

Straight to the point, Matthew, will you follow me? And Matthew leaves everything, everything that he knows, everything that he does. And he gives it all up to follow Jesus.

[6 : 31] And Matthew has written this gospel to his fellow Jews with the explicit purpose of helping them see that despite their failings as God's people, both personally and collectively, that Jesus is God's promised Messiah, the one that he said he would send.

And Matthew wants us to see that what he's writing here is really important. It's really important. I don't know what you guys do if you're writing something.

If you're writing an email, you're writing an essay, you're writing a document, something like that. How do you indicate that something's really important, that you want your readers to understand something is important? What do you do? You do the highlighters, good old classic highlighters.

You maybe do the little red-colored flags to indicate that something's important. If you've got an email, you maybe put it in bold or italics or something like that. Let me show you if you've got the text there, Matthew's equivalent.

So Matthew, verses 16 and 17, do you see how twice he uses the phrase behold? Yeah, twice he uses it. Behold. Behold, behold.

[7 : 35] It's his way of saying, slow down for a minute. Slow down for a minute. And lift your eyes and take what I'm about to tell you in. Because what I'm about to tell you is really, really important.

And you need to understand it. So he says it twice. He says, behold, behold. This encounter here is really important. Matthew wants us to see two quick things from this passage.

We're just going to rattle through these today. Two things he wants us to see. Here's the first. He wants us to see the son who identifies with us. So come with me to verse 13.

Matthew lets us know that Jesus has made his way south from Galilee in the north to the Jordan River. Now, geographies, it's always important to think about why writers are telling us about geography here.

And I think the reason is that this is a long journey. Call this something like 70 miles. Jesus has traveled to be at the River Jordan here. You want to put that into a kind of Scottish context, that is just more than here to Dundee.

[8 : 43] Okay, it's a long way. And Jesus is doing this on foot. Which tells you what as you read this. That there's a real purpose to Jesus' trip. He's here for a specific reason.

Jesus goes to the Jordan to meet his relative, who's John the Baptist. This man who God had spoken about years before through the prophet Isaiah, who was going to be the forerunner to the Messiah.

His job, he had one job. And his job was to get people ready for the Messiah's coming. That's his job. Not a very long job description, that one, is it?

Get the people ready for the Messiah's coming. In the immediate verses, if you want to glance your eye back to the beginning of chapter 3, this is exactly what he's doing. He's saying to people, you are not right with God.

Not right with God. Outwardly, you might be the right people, because you're Jewish. But inwardly, you are not right with God.

[9 : 50] And you need to repent. You need to stop going your way. You need to acknowledge your sin. Your need for a saviour. And you need to start going God's way.

And the thing to see, as John the Baptist is doing his thing, is that people aren't watching on, thinking, what a load of nonsense that is. Boy, has he got a bee in his bonnet about something else.

What are the people doing? You see, what John is saying about God and about them is absolutely striking a chord with the hearts of these people.

Because they know what he's saying is true. They know what he's saying is true. And they are flocking to John. And verse 6, they are confessing their sins.

Going down into the water. The water probably, I imagine, symbolizing to them that they know that they need to be made clean. They know on the inside that they're not clean. And they're throwing themselves on the mercy of God, saying, we want to be made clean.

[11 : 00] So this is going on. This is the scene at the Jordan. And then, out of nowhere, comes Jesus. He appears. And he comes on the scene.

And the thing to see is, it's not as if Jesus comes up and he says, right, John, you've had your five minutes in the sun, bro. Move on and let the real professional come and do his job. Doesn't do that.

Now, he wants John, and get your head around this, he wants John to baptize him. Now, John's sitting there. He's standing there, to imagine. He's not sitting. He's standing there. And in his head, he's thinking, I know two things.

Right? I know, firstly, that I am in the same category as the people that I'm baptizing. Sinner, need a savior. There's two categories that exist. And me and the rest of the world are in this one.

And I know that Jesus stands alone in another category. Sinless is the savior. So you can understand his puzzled reaction at verse 14.

[11 : 59] He's saying, Jesus, you have got this one the wrong way around. You're coming to me and asking me to baptize you. It should be the other way around. And you've got to say he's right. Okay? Think about this.

Is it not a bit like Tiger Woods coming up to us, right? Rory McIlroy, you take your pick of golfer. And saying, do you know what? I just need somebody to help me on my backswing. Right?

My coach isn't really up to it at the minute. Do you fancy stepping in and helping me? Right? Or Adele coming up to us and saying, listen, I've fired my voice coach and I'm really struggling to hit that high note every time I sing hello.

Do you think you could come and you could help me out with it? It's the wrong way around. It's the wrong way around. But Jesus is insistent that there has to be like this.

Now, here's the million dollar question in this text. Why? Why does Jesus need to get baptized? Because he's got no sins to repent of.

[12 : 57] Why does he need to do it? See him explain it in verse 15. Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.

So there's our answer. Now, what's he talking about? Well, the answer is found in that passage we read earlier in Isaiah 53. And in there, in the context of that, God is speaking.

It's the fourth song in that little section of Isaiah where God is speaking about his servant. The servant who will accomplish God's mission.

So the one, the mission that was hatched in eternity past to seek and to save sinners the world over. And God is going to accomplish it through the work of the servant.

And one of the things that the servant will do as he does that is that he will be, and you might have heard the phrase as we read it through there, numbered with the transgressors.

[14 : 02] So this servant is going to voluntarily humble himself and give himself over to be treated as if he were one of the guilty.

You know, it's amazing to think that Jesus, like every other Jewish boy growing up, would have known his scriptures. You'd have read this countless times before.

It's what you did if you were a Jewish boy, right? Scottish people, what did we do? We grew up doing Cayleys. It's just what we did. You're a Jewish boy. You grew up knowing your scriptures. You just know them.

We'd have known that this was about him. That this was to be his life. He reads this knowing that he is this suffering servant.

The one who would be led like a lamb to the slaughter in the place of the guilty. He knows he's this guy. So here it is then, Jesus in Matthew 3, probably about 30 years old, which is aside, is the age where a priest would fully begin his full-time ministry.

[15 : 09] We don't have time to go there, but that is a fascinating fact, is it not? And here he is being publicly baptized. And in so doing, here he is, as it were, identifying himself with sinful humanity.

Here he is stepping in for us, right? And you put your own names to this if you trust us in Jesus today. But he stepped in because I failed.

Stepping in for us, declaring to the world, Jesus, I am willing to do this. Willing to do what we couldn't do for ourselves. Now, what is that? What couldn't we do for ourselves?

The answer is in the text. Live a life of perfect righteousness. Okay, it's one of these words that the Bible uses to describe a life that is fully and godwardly and perfectly obedient to the Lord.

And you read on in Scripture, you get this constant refrain that it's the righteous who will ascend God's holy hill. It is the righteous who will find favor with God. It's the righteous who will be blessed by God.

[16 : 17] And so here's the problem, that no human being is fully righteous. So by nature, we are not law keepers. We are law breakers.

We don't deserve God's blessing. We deserve God's curse. And yet, here is Jesus, the sinless one, stepping in and identifying himself with us. Publicly saying that I'm standing in for them.

Now, this works two ways. Here he is declaring that he is both willing to take the curse that should be ours because of our sin and live the righteous life that we could not live.

And as we are united to him in faith, that righteousness of his becomes ours. It's an incredible thought, is it not?

So then God looks at me because of my faith in Jesus. Me. He looks at me and he sees his son. Because my life has become so caught up in the person of Jesus.

[17 : 29] And the baptism here pictures the life that is ahead of him because he is willing to be that suffering servant. He will die. He will go under the water, as it were. As he dies on the cross, and yet death will not have the last word over him.

He will rise up from the water. The two greatest enemies against us were what? Sin, our sin, and death because of it. What does Jesus do?

He dies. The death we should have died, he deals with our sin. And he rises again, showing that death will not have the last word over us because it did not have the last word over him.

And he lives. He lives. So friends, it's a wonderful time for us to remember that Jesus lives.

And he is the one that said, I am the resurrection and the life. And I was reading an article from an Italian pastor this week. And I'll send you the link if you want. I'll maybe post it on my Facebook or something like that.

[18 : 27] You can check it out. Talking about the difficulties they're having as a church in Italy. They're having to get creative, like we might have too, about how they can meet together, be involved in one another's lives. What they've done is they've started just streaming.

He's live streaming his sermons and everyone's tuning in. And what he's seeing happening is that there's a massive spike in people from outwith the church who want to view it. This is what he's saying.

This is going on right now. And he reckons the reason is that people are looking around thinking, what on earth is going on? Now, you even hear that the non-Christian professionals talking about the fragility of life, don't you, in our news at the minute?

Fragility of life. I heard somebody this morning use the word, it's sobering. And it is sobering. And so Pastor Nathalie is surrounded by people who are asking big questions about life, big questions about the hope that Christians have.

And so they're tuning in to see what this is about. People in our world, they're asking big questions about life and death. Right? And so, can I say, we just don't want to be known at this season.

[19 : 27] It wouldn't be awful if 20 years' time we looked back and the biggest concern in our minds was whether we had enough toilet roll. But it would, wouldn't I? I'm being serious. It would be a tragedy if we looked back on our generation and we saw that.

But wouldn't it be great instead of, as a generation, being known for hoarding toilet roll, that we were the generation, as Christians, God's people here, who were known for giving toilet roll.

Yeah? Right? Holding out life. There is hope in the person of Jesus. And he is the one who has conquered death and come back to life. And we're going to see this in a minute.

And it's him we look to as our saviour and as our king. He died. He rose. Let me just ask you, in your own devotional life, are you savouring Jesus?

Because of his willingness to be the saviour for you. Right? In a world where people, they duck out of responsibility all the time. I heard two phrases in the last couple of weeks. I heard somebody refer to somebody as having Peter Pan syndrome.

[20 : 28] Right? And that they just won't grow up in life. I heard somebody else talk about a kidult. You heard about kidult? A kid, adult. You just meshed the words, right? So it's an adult who behaves like a child.

A person's a kidult. And so in life where we are surrounded by people who often don't take responsibility for things, here is a saviour who took responsibility for our sin and our lives head on.

The words of Graham Kendrick, and I love this song of his, My Lord, what love is this that pays so dearly, that I, the guilty one, may go free. Amazing love, oh, what sacrifice.

The Son of God given for me. My debt he pays and my death he dies, that I might live. That I might live. Matthew wants us to see the Son who identifies with us.

And secondly, and this will be a lot quicker, he wants us to see the Father who rejoices over him. So see in the text, and this is glorious, see how heaven reacts to this scene on earth.

[21 : 39] Jesus comes out of the water, verse 16, and what happens? Who's in the scene? The Spirit, you see? Sent to strengthen Jesus in his ministry.

Come to empower him for his mission. Come as a dove. And people have all sorts of different theories about what that is. No one really fully knows. My guess would be that it's most likely symbolizing that he has come to make peace between God and man.

Thinking about to Noah and the dove. And that is going to be a reality for all those who look to him in faith. Peace between God and man. So the Spirit's in the scene.

And verse 17, the Father's in the scene. So here we have, think about this. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit right here. All three persons of the Godhead are playing their role in this mission.

And we should sense, if we're on the ball, just because of where we've been over the last month or so, we should sense echoes of Genesis 1 here. Remember Genesis 1? The Spirit of God hovering over the waters.

[22 : 45] And where there's a sense of anticipation about what God is about to do in his creative work as he glorifies himself. And of course, the mission that's been publicly declared to a watching world by a thrilled Godhead is all about bringing the possibility of you and I sharing in the new creation to the personal work of Jesus.

And so Matthew says, behold. Behold. See it. Lift your eyes. Take it in. What does he say specifically? Verse 17. He says, behold what the Father says about the Son.

Verse 17. This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.

Now, I don't know what you do when you book a holiday. One of your experiences is ever like mine. You go online. You enter the dates that you're looking for in travel supermarket or something else like that.

And the search results come up. And you're scrolling through. And you're looking at the pictures, thinking that looks great. Pool looks great. The buffet looks nice. People seem to be having a good time.

[23 : 56] But I don't know if you're like us. What sells a holiday for us is not so much what the hotel says about itself. It's what the people who have been to the hotel say about it.

Right? Did they have a good time? Was the food cold? Were there bugs in the room? They tell you the reality of what it's like. Is it worth it? Here's what we need to see.

That with this son, not only could there not be a better recommendation of him to us, but do you see how it could not come from a better source?

This is my son, says God. Right? If you can check this out in your own time, there's echoes there of Psalm 2.

God says, I will install my king on his holy hill. I will sing over him, says God. I delight in him. That's echoes of Isaiah 42. If you want to check that out in your own time as well.

[24 : 55] We just don't have time to go there today. And I love him, says God, because I know everything that's in my son's heart and mind that he's going to do.

And I love him for it. Because of that, I am well pleased with him. You've got to understand, we've got to see that God the Father beams as he thinks about his son.

But here's a question I was asking myself this week. As you look at this scene, why does Jesus need to know that? Surely he already does know that.

That's what the Godhead have been doing ever since eternity passed. Just existing as a loving community of the three in one. I know that's deep. Just go with it. Okay. It's what they've been doing.

Why does Jesus the Son need to know that the Father loves him? Okay, I can understand why I need to know it. I'm pretty slow on the uptake at the best of times. But why does the Son need to know this?

[25 : 59] Think about it. Because I think it's so powerful. Why does he need to know it? Surely the answer is that the Father gives him this public affirmation.

And it's not directed simply to the Son. It's directed to the world, isn't it? But what he thinks about the Son. It's written because the Father knows. He loves the willingness of his Son.

But he knows what it's going to cost him. And the suffering that the Son is going to take on himself as a result. And could it not be that the Father knows that the Son might doubt this?

Okay, you turn to the very next chapter of Matthew. Very next chapter. And the devil's there saying, if you are the Son of God. But you've got to understand, it even gets even greater than that.

As Jesus hangs on the cross, what does he say? Bearing the sin of the world on himself. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's what he's crying.

[27 : 00] The words of Psalm 22. So has the Father on the cross turned his face away as Jesus bears the wrath of God upon himself? Has the Father turned his face away?

Yes. But has the Father ever, for one moment, stopped loving his Son? No. What's the lesson?

That if our faith is in Jesus, and this is so powerful where we are in a minute. If our faith is in Jesus, we've got to understand that we are his. No matter what goes on in life, we are his.

He has made us his own. And what that means is that we are adopted as God's son or daughter. And what that means is that as hard as life gets, we can base our lives on the truth that our Father will never stop loving us.

in the same way that he loves his Son. No matter how hard life gets, and we need to be speaking that truth to one another and to the world during this next season, that is a truth on which we can base our lives.

[28 : 15] He loves us. And what does Paul write at the end of Romans chapter 8? Nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nothing. And so the invitation then, as we see the swelling heart of God, beaming with love for his Son, is to stop and to behold and to come and to breathe him in and know him as your Lord and Savior and delight in him too.

So what happens when we become Christians, isn't it, is the Lord transforms our hearts that obedience to Jesus no longer is a duty. It is a delight because we love the Son.

And as the Son publicly here identifies himself with us, the question we need to ask ourselves as we close is whether we're willing to identify ourselves with him.

That's what we do when we get baptized. Many of us here will have done that before. Some of us won't have done that. Let me encourage you that if your faith is in Jesus, if this reality is for you, if he has made you his because you trust in what he's done for you on the cross, if your faith is in him, friends, we need to obey him and get baptized.

We need to say to the world that as the Son identified with me in my sin, I am publicly identifying with him in my baptism. It's the same, isn't it? We go down, we come up.

[29 : 48] We identify with him in his death, he died for us, and his life becomes ours. Saying he has made me his. Therefore, I'm declaring that to the watching world that I love the Son.

I love him. And just as we close, you think to yourself, well, what is it we're declaring? And I just want to put up some words, and we can read these together just as we close.

These are some words from the New City Catechism. Catechism was just a way that years ago, and the church still do it today, years ago, this was a way of parents particularly teaching their children the truths about the faith.

And it was done in a question and answer thing, right? And it's a way of helping one another publicly, helping us think about what it is we believe. So this is the New City Catechism, right?

We're going to read this together just as we close, and then I'll pray. So let's read this together. This is what we believe. What is our only hope in life and death? There's the question. Okay?

[30 : 50] That I am not my own. Read with me, okay? That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head.

Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Why don't we just take a moment just before we, I pray and then we'll sing our final song. Why don't we just take a moment and in light of everything that's going on in our world just now and in our lives, why don't we just bring our own prayers to God, knowing that 1 Peter chapter 5, that he wants us to cast all our burdens on him because he cares for us as our good Father.

So why don't we do that just for a moment and then I'll pray. The words of Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd.

[32 : 21] I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for sending your son. Thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ. And so Father, I pray simply through your Holy Spirit that he would lift our eyes to look upon him and to gaze upon his beauty and to know the reality of what it means to be his.

So Father, help us this week to be the community of salt and light that you call us to be, to be that city on a hill.

Father, we ask for your enabling help through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.