

10-4-20
The Character of John the Baptist
It Can Be Our Character
Matthew 3:13-15

Open with this Christmas video...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWv72L4wgCc>

I wanted to start off with a little fun this morning.

You better watch out You better not cry Better not pout
I'm telling you why Santa Claus is coming to town
He's making a list And checking it twice; Gonna find out Who's naughty
and nice. Santa Claus is coming to town
He sees you when you're sleeping
He knows when you're awake He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake!

We know that song pretty well don't we? We have sung it ourselves. We have thought about it as kids and probably had nightmares about it. Our parents or you, as parents used this to try and get you kids to straighten up a month or two before Christmas.

But here's why I share this song. In a pretty similar way this is the message of John the Baptist isn't it?

You better watch out and repent, for the kingdom of heaven is coming in a unique way. You better watch out for the axe is laid at the root of the trees and the ones who are not bearing good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire. You better watch out for the King knows if you have been good or bad and He has his winnowing fork in His hand and He is going to separate the wheat from the chaff , the good from the bad and the bad is going to be thrown into the unquenchable fire.

You better watch out for the King is coming to town.

Such are the warnings of John the Baptist.

Now we move into a time where Jesus comes on the scene. It is His first recorded public appearance as an adult and the initiation of His public ministry which we will begin to look at next week.

For this morning let's begin reading the first part of this section of Matthew 3.

Matthew 3:13-15, "Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.'"

In this short exchange there are several things happening but let's focus on John the Baptist for a bit.

One of the first things we see here is...

1. John's humility in the presence of the Messiah

After realizing the call that was on his life, John takes on the role of being the forerunner of the Messiah, the one who cries out make ready the way of the Lord. And then, Jesus, the Messiah appears at the bank of the Jordan.

You can probably imagine John's surprise and delight when he sees Jesus and by the Holy Spirit recognizes who He is. Remember, this is John's possible cousin or a close relative. We are not told exactly what the relationship was between Mary and John's mother Elizabeth was only that John's mother was a relative of Mary's.

But John and Jesus did not grow up in the same area. Jesus was in Nazareth while John probably grew up in the Jerusalem area so Jesus was not known by sight by John.

Again, I am sure John was overcome that the one who he was saying was coming, came and came to where he was and...not only this but Jesus came to be baptized by John.

John was so overwhelmed by the presence of the Messiah that it says in verse 14, he tried to prevent Jesus from getting baptized by him. John even said I don't need to baptize you but it is I who needs to be baptized by You.

In this exchange we see the great humility of John. He believes that Jesus is the one from God, the one who is filled with the Holy Spirit, one who is the going to be the Savior of the world as well as the Judge of the world. That Jesus is Messiah is not a question. That Jesus is the Holy One of God is not the question. That Jesus would want to be baptized by John who knows he has fallen short as a man is the question.

Why do you come to me when I have need to come to you he asks. Very humble on the part of John. Remember, by this time John has quite a following. As you read through his ministry you read about John's disciples. He probably has hundreds of men and women who believe in his message and who are following him and his teachings.

But we also know John later says this about himself when he is asked who he is in relation to Jesus. **John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."** Great humility and great recognition of John concerning his part in the unfolding drama of the Kingdom of God.

The second thing I see happening in this exchange between Jesus and John is John's hesitation.

2. John hesitates being obedient to Jesus' request

John hesitates being obedient to Jesus' request. Who can blame him in this particular case? John is baptizing for the forgiveness of sins and the Holy One of God comes along and asks to enter into John's baptism of forgiveness.

You can see John's confusion. You are the Holy One of God why would you need to be baptized. This is a question you might even ask as you read this account. Why would Jesus, the Son of God, need to be baptized. Well, we are going to answer that question next week but for now, look at Jesus' response and then John's obedience to Jesus' request.

Vs. 15, "But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for *us* to fulfill all righteousness. Then he (John) permitted Him."

Again, we will dive into the reason for Jesus' baptism next week but after John quizzes the request of Jesus, this passage says John permits Jesus to be baptized. I thought this statement was kind of wild, John permitted Jesus to be baptized.

I wonder if what this is saying is that John pushed down the confusion in his heart and even though he did not understand why Jesus needed to be baptized he followed through with the request of Jesus.

I see that...

3. Even though what Jesus was asking John to do didn't make sense, John *was* obedient

John was obedient to Jesus' request and I think there were a few reasons why that we can identify with.

First, like John the Baptist, because you are here this morning I would assume that...

4. You have proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of your life

John the Baptist had a special call upon his life. He was called as the one and only person who would come before Jesus and cry out, the King is coming, make yourself ready for the ways of the Lord. But you have made that call out for yourself haven't you? You have proclaimed Jesus as your Savior.

If you haven't then let me encourage you to give me a call or get a hold of someone you know is walking with the Lord and ask them what it means to have Jesus as your Savior. Please don't put this off because in this life, no one is assured another day of life.

Now, if you have accepted Jesus as your Savior I have no doubt that when you first came into His presence and as you have come into His presence since then, I bet, like John,

5. You have experienced humility by being in the presence of Jesus

This happens in different ways at different times in our lives doesn't it?

You are in a church service and you hear a passage or a part of the sermon and it draws you to the Lord and you feel the His presence. You are listening to praise music or worshipping here or maybe reading the Bible or a devotional in your quiet place and you feel the presence of the Lord with you. And in those times you are humbled not only by His presence but by His love. No one can help but feel this way in the presence of the Lord.

I know for me and I suspect for you that this is what you hunger for isn't it? To feel the presence of the Lord. And here is how you can do that. What was John doing when Jesus showed up? He was being obedient to what He was called to do. In His case, sharing the good news of the coming kingdom, telling people they should repent and be baptized.

For us, maybe obedience looks like reading the Bible, praying, calling on someone, giving something up, surrendering that part of your life you have been hanging on to or that sin you have been hanging on to. So many different ways the Holy Spirit comes to us and prompts us to do this or that or to don't do this or that. But when we are obedient to the Holy Spirit we feel the presence of Jesus right there, helping us along.

I know when I am prompted to call someone, visit someone, go the extra mile in service to even my wife, I walk away more blessed than the person I served. Why? Because Jesus took my hand and walked with me the entire way.

I know we are like John the Baptist at times and that is we are hesitant to be obedient to what Jesus is asking us to do. For John, what Jesus asked him to baptize Him, it didn't make any sense to John and might not have ever made any sense to him during his stay here on earth.

Isn't it true that...

6. Sometimes, the things the Holy Spirit asks us to do doesn't fit into our thoughts about how things should be done

But let me show you two things that occurred when John was obedient even though he didn't understand the purpose for it.

Look back at verse 15 in your outline with me again.

Vs. 15 But Jesus answering said to him (John), 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for *us* to fulfill all righteousness.'

Something unique jumped out at me when I read through this passage several times. I wonder if you see it?

Look and think about what Jesus said. Permit it (My baptism) at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.

Notice Jesus didn't say permit it at this time for in this way it is fitting for Me to fulfill all righteousness. It wasn't just Jesus who was involved in fulfilling God's plan for Jesus and all righteousness. It was Jesus and John. It was us Jesus said.

As I thought about this I realized that when the Holy Spirit asks us to step out and do this or to step back and not do that thing, we are not left to our own means. It is us, Jesus and you that is doing it.

I believe what we can expect is for Jesus to say, let us go do this thing. Let us, Me and you go talk with this person. Let us confess this sin. Let us, Me and you let's release this thing that has you trapped.

7. Jesus says, let Me and you walk out the path of righteousness that I have laid out before you

Jesus never expects us to go at it alone. He wants us to feel His presence, to know His power and strength. To know the assurance and peace that He is with you in everything you face.

Look at the results of John's obedience to Jesus' request.

Matthew 3:16-17, "After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

We will break this down a little bit next week but because of John's obedience in fulfilling Jesus' request of baptism the heavens opened up, the Spirit descended and God spoke.

Of course this is in the initiation of Jesus' ministry and a very unique situation but we can experience something similar when we are obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I have been spending time with a couple who is stepping out, selling their home and are moving back east. They are not sure where they are going and what it is going to look like but God has blessed them in the selling of their home, giving them more than enough money for such a venture. God has blessed them with the capacity to find work wherever they go. God has blessed them in the moment in so many ways and they are beginning to realize this. But as they move forward, they have a choice. Will I let the Lord lead or will I forge my way ahead myself.

Moses of the Old Testament had the same choice in his journey in life. Through God's powerful working, he and God led the people out of slavery in Egypt. As the people continued on their journey in life they were led out into the desert where things got a bit tough.

And people being people, not only did they begin to grumble and complain about how hard the journey was, they began to take matters into their own hands. They began making decisions for themselves without any consultation with the God who delivered them from slavery.

This led them to a place where God said you want it your way, go for it. Do your own thing. I am not going to force My presence and leadership upon you. You go where you want to go and do what you want to do but don't count on My presence fighting for you.

This didn't set well Moses. He knew how important it was to have the Lord leading them so the following exchange happened.

Exodus 33:15, 14, “Then Moses said to God, ‘If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.’ And God said, ‘My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest.”

Moses said don't point us in a direction if You not with us. Don't allow us to go on a journey if You are not leading us.

I know this life is hard. Hearing the voice of the Lord can be hard at times. But unlike Moses we can be assured that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us. But I also know we can hesitate and question the leading of the Lord. I know at times we can stifle the voice of the Holy Spirit and go our own way and do our own thing.

But when we are obedient, when we step out in faith and do those things God is asking us to do, even when we don't understand how it fits or how it will work out, we can expect God and Jesus' presence to be right there with us.

The heavens open up, the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit rises up within us and God looks down and says in the moment, this is my son or daughter in whom I am well pleased. As the couple I mentioned seek the Lord and His leading their life is going to be a blessed life. Always easy, no but always blessed.

When God told Moses He would go with him He said I will give you rest. When Jesus promised to go with us He said I will give you peace and My joy. When John was obedient to Jesus' request, he heard the voice of God.

Peace, rest, joy, the opening up and release of power from heaven on our behalf and God's voice, the presence of Jesus going with us. These are all things we can expect as we are obedient to Jesus and the Holy Spirit's requests in our life.

It doesn't get any better in this life than this. Amen? Let's pray