

# Set Sail Ministries

“Anchored in the Cross. Sailing by the Breath of the Spirit.”

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**Sermon Title: “The King Arrives”**

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**Text:** Matthew 3:13-17

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**Location:** Aurora Alliance Church, Aurora, Colorado

**Main Idea:** Jesus was baptized in order to show Israel that He was the Messiah by being anointed with the Spirit

**Homiletical Idea:** We should obey God in all things because it pleases Him and makes Him pleased with us.

**Purpose of Sermon:** I expect that the hearers will understand that obedience is a choice. And even though it is not always an easy one, it is right to obey. God expresses his pleasure with us when we obey.

## INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago a new pope was elected in the Catholic Church. And for many of the world’s Catholics there was a sense of excited anticipation. They were anxiously awaiting the announcement. Wondering who would it be? What country would he be from and on what day would he be elected? They knew that the event would happen, but they didn’t know many of the details.

That is kind of how the Jewish people were at the time that John the Baptist started preaching. They were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Messiah. They knew he was coming. And they knew a few things about him. But they didn’t know when and where he would arrive.

Today we will look at the baptism of Jesus and see how that event relates to the arrival of the Messiah that the Jews were waiting for. The passage is Matthew chapter 3:13-17. I’d like to do 2 things today: First, to analyze this passage verse by verse and then to look at how we can apply it to our lives.

Let’s start by watching this scene of Jesus’ baptism from the Visual Bible. It is word for word from the Bible for Matthew 3:13-17. [SHOW VIDEO]

## I. The significance of Jesus’ journey to the Jordan

Verse 13: *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.*

### A. The distance may not be obvious to us

The first thing I want us to look at is relationship between Galilee and the Jordan River. Were they close or were they far apart? The Gospel of Mark tells us that He came from the city of Nazareth in the Galilee region. And Nazareth is where Jesus spent his childhood. I had to brush up on my geography of Israel, but fortunately, being a geologist, I love maps, so that was easy! [show map on screen].

### B. The distance is long

Now if told you that you had to walk from downtown Denver to Colorado Springs, you might know about how far that was even if you didn’t know the exact mileage. Well,

that is just about exactly how far it was from Nazareth to where John was baptizing: about 70 miles. But remember: Jesus was walking. So keep in mind: Denver to Colorado Springs. For Jesus to make this trip, it would have been at least a 2 day walk, possible several more than that, depending on his route. [Explain map]



## II. The significance of the Jordan River

### A. The Jordan River was important in Israel's history

So what about the Jordan River itself? Was it important that Jesus be baptized there? Was it important that Jesus be baptized in the exact spot where it happened? Absolutely.

#### 1. Israelites crossed Jordan from the east near Jericho

One of the first major events that happened at the Jordan River in the Bible was when Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land through the river. Moses had led them out of Egypt, they wandered around in the desert for 40 years, then God led them around to enter the Promised Land from the east. But they had to cross the Jordan river to do that.

I can imagine them sitting around the camp the night before saying, "How are we all going to get across this big river." Well, God had a plan. God told Joshua, that the priests were to go first and carry the Ark of the Covenant and when their feet

touched the water, God would part it, just like He did at the Red Sea and the people would be able to walk across on dry land.

And that is exactly what happened. The Israelites crossed the Jordan River near Jericho, just a few miles north of the Dead Sea at the red dot on the map.. So the Israelites very first experience with the Jordan River involved a miracle. I think that is something they would have remembered and passed down to their children.

## **2. Elijah divided the river, then taken up in a chariot of fire on the east side**

What else? The next major event recorded in the Bible that happened at the Jordan River involved the prophet Elijah. Elijah was the one that never actually died, but God took him from the earth to Heaven in a chariot of fire.

The account is in 2 Kings where we see Elijah and his fellow prophet Elisha traveling from Jericho to the Jordan. When they got there, Elijah rolled up his coat and struck the water, the water parted and they walked over to the other side on dry land. At which point I imagine Elisha turning to Elijah and saying something like, “Dude, you da man!”.

So it was right on the banks of the Jordan River that God sent the chariot of fire and a whirlwind to take Elijah to Heaven. And where did this happen? In the exact same place that the Israelites crossed over several hundred years before. Right near Jericho.

## **B. Summary and spiritual parallels**

So we see that for the Jews, big things happened at the Jordan River. Miraculous things. And not just anywhere along the Jordan, but at this one particular spot. When John started preaching and baptizing there, you have to wonder if they thought, “I wonder if God is going to do another miracle at this spot.” Well they were right!

One last thing before we move on. We know that many of the things that happened in the Old Testament were types and shadows of things to come and there is a spiritual parallel that I want you to see.

The name ‘Jesus’ is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, ‘Joshua’. The first Joshua led God’s people into the physical Promised Land, and God did a miracle by parting the water. And now, another Joshua was about to lead God’s people into the spiritual Promised Land. And this time God didn’t part the water, He parted the heavens. But I’m getting ahead of myself. It was no coincidence that Jesus came to this place to be baptized. It was God’s plan all along

## **III. John attempts to prevent Jesus’ baptism; then consents**

Verses 14 and 15: *But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* <sup>15</sup> *Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."*

### **A. John’s baptism was a sign of repentance**

Last week Jonas talked about John the Baptist in detail. We learned that John called the people to confess their sin and repent, then be baptized because the kingdom of heaven was near. Basically he was asking them to prepare their hearts for the arrival of the Messiah, the Christ. In fact, John said that reason he came baptizing was so that the Messiah could be revealed.(John 1:31) John called the people to prepare their hearts and many did.

The concept of baptism wasn’t new in Israel, but John was using it in a new way. Previously the Jews were not the ones baptized, but if a foreigner wanted to become a Jew

then they would have been baptized in water. But John was now asking the Jews themselves to be baptized. The new meaning of baptism was 2-fold: 1st a public recognition that they were turning from their sin, and 2nd a consecration or a dedication of themselves to God for the future.

## **B. John saw that Jesus didn't need to repent**

Recognizing this repentance aspect, John looked at Jesus and basically said, "You don't need to be baptized by me, I need to be baptized by you!" John recognized a holiness, a right-ness in Jesus that he didn't see even in the religious leaders of the day (Pharisees and Sadducees).

Now there is an interesting aspect to the relationship between John and Jesus that we don't really pick up in Matthew but that is recorded in the Gospel of John. In chapter 1 it says,

*John testified saying... "I did not recognize Him [referring to Jesus], but He who sent me to baptize in water [of course is God] said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'"*

John would know the Messiah when the Holy Spirit descended and remained on someone.

The interesting part is that John the Baptist and Jesus were cousins, so they must have at least known of each other, and probably had met at some point. But the Bible says that John had been in the wilderness almost his whole life and it appears that he didn't know for sure that Jesus was the Messiah. But even not knowing, he still recognized the holiness and purity in Jesus and that Jesus didn't need to repent.

## **C. Why was Jesus baptized?**

So if Jesus had no sin, nothing to repent of, why did he need to be baptized? Well, I see 4 reasons and I'll mention them briefly:

### **1. Misc ideas**

**a. 1<sup>st</sup> Jesus was confessing the sins of the nation of Israel** Just like many of the Old Testament prophets before him confessing not only their personal sin, but also the sins of the nation.

**b. 2<sup>nd</sup> Jesus was identifying with us** letting us know that he understood our need for repentance.

**c. 3<sup>rd</sup> It was the event that started His ministry** Remember we talked about Joshua earlier who led God's people into the promised land? Crossing the Jordan was the first major thing he did after he took over from Moses. Joshua 3:7 says, "*God began to magnify Joshua there (at the Jordan)*". And that's exactly what he did for Jesus. Jesus was almost completely unknown before this, but God began to magnify Him there at the Jordan.

### **2. To fulfill all righteousness**

But there is a 4<sup>th</sup> reason. The text says that it was to "fulfill all righteousness". What exactly does that mean? I'll be honest, there is a part here that I don't yet understand. There is a bigger picture of what God is doing that I just haven't been able to get my arms around yet. But let me tell you what I do know.

For the Jews of that time, righteousness meant primarily obeying all of the laws that God had given them. Jesus too had to obey all the laws We read later on in Matthew where Jesus says,

*"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."*

When we look back in the Old Testament when God first set up the job of priest with Moses' brother Aaron, and then eventually all of the Levites, we learn some interesting things. They had to be 30 years old in order to serve in the temple. And before they could enter into service as a priest they had to undergo a special dedication ceremony. In the first part of that ceremony, the priests were washed with water. And in the last part, they were anointed with oil.

Jesus, was about to enter into a ministry essentially as a priest, though as a true priest of God, rather than a part of the religious system of the time. And the Bible tells us that he was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. Therefore, in his baptism, he was both washed with water, and anointed with the Holy Spirit which is what being anointed with oil represented. In fact, the very word, 'Messiah' means "The Anointed One." So Jesus completely fulfilled this part of the law even though he wasn't joining the official priesthood.  
(Num 4:3 Exodus 29:1-7 Numbers 8:5-7)

#### **D. John baptizes Jesus**

*Then John consented.*

We'll touch more on this when we get to the application but basically, John felt unworthy. He didn't feel worthy to baptize his own cousin because of the holiness that surrounded Jesus. He didn't feel worthy, but he was willing. The Life Application Bible Commentary says that God is often less concerned with our worthiness, and more concerned with our willingness. John didn't feel worthy, but he was willing, and so he baptized Jesus.

### **IV. Jesus is baptized by God**

Verse 16: *As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment the heavens were opened"*

Here is where the account really gets exciting!

#### **A. The Heavens were opened**

Jesus exits the water and the heavens were opened. The NIV says they were torn open. The prophet Isaiah had cried out, "*Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down.*" He knew that God seemed far away from the Jews and unapproachable at that time and he longed for God to be close again. So here we see the heavens being torn open with the idea that no longer will God be unapproachable, but now God will be close to us.

#### **B. The Spirit descends on Him**

Continuing in verse 16: *"the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him"*

Major prophecies about the Messiah begin to be fulfilled right here. Isaiah 11 says, "*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him.*" Isaiah 42 says, "*here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him.*" And Isaiah 61 which Jesus quoted later about himself, "*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me...*"

The Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus was the direct fulfillment of many prophecies.

#### **C. God Speaks**

Verse 17: *“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”*

### **1. The delivery of His message**

God speaks from Heaven and it seems that everyone heard it. This is so amazing to me. For over 400 years God has been silent and now for the first time the silence is broken!!! Imagine if God had not spoken to anyone or through any prophet since the 1600’s. That’s a long time! Not only do we have the first prophet in 400 years (John the Baptist), but now God Himself speaks audibly! God had spoken to Israel through His prophets often up until 400 years prior to this, but his last audible words were way before that.

God’s last words to the Jews were given to the prophet Malachi. God said in Malachi 4:5-6 *“See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.”* Later on in Matthew chapter 11, Jesus says that John the Baptist was the Elijah that was to come.

Now I’m going off on a tangent here, but do you see how all of God’s word fits together. God takes Elijah from the earth right at this spot by the Jordan river. He tells the people that He will send Elijah back. Jesus says John the Baptist is the Elijah that God was talking about, and where does John start his ministry: right beside the Jordan and the same exact spot Elijah was taken from.

I think that is awesome! Only God could plan something like that. Do you see how incredibly all of God’s word fits together? People say it’s just a bunch of madeup stories. No, it isn’t. It truly is inspired by God. The Old Testament and the New, they are not 2 separate plans. They both make up the one plan that is God’s.

### **2. The content of His message**

Okay back to the real sermon! So God speaks and what does He say: *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

Wow. The book Intense Moments with the Savior by Ken Gire says that it is interesting that God would speak these words at this point in Jesus’ life. *“What has Jesus accomplished to merit such approval? He hasn’t taught in the synagogue or triumphed over Satan. He hasn’t preached a sermon or cast out a demon. He hasn’t healed a person or made a single disciple. He hasn’t done anything special, let alone spectacular. So why was his Father so pleased?”* And I believe the answer is: because Jesus was obedient. That’s how much God values obedience.

Can you imagine how Jesus must have felt to hear His Father audibly tell Him that he loved Him? And to know for sure that He was pleasing God? That must have been amazing for Him to hear.

I want to encourage you fathers out there, and I am one myself, to apply this message to your own children. If I were to ask all of you how often your own father told you that he loved you and was proud of you, many of you would tell me, *“Not enough.”* Daddies: tell your children that you love them. Tell them today, and tomorrow and every day. And when they obey and do what is right, tell them that you are pleased with them. Don’t let your children grow up and say, *“I wish my father had said ‘I love you’ more often. Tell them often.*

So God reminds Jesus: *“I love you son. I’m proud of you. You’re on the right track.”* What an encouragement for Jesus and what an encouragement for the people listening that day and for us reading about it: that God loves His Son and He loves us and He is pleased when we choose to obey Him.

## **D. The Trinity**

One final thing that we see here in this passage. In Christianity we have this concept of the Trinity: we serve 1 God, but He is 3 persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is a difficult concept for us humans to get our arms around sometimes. But in this passage, for the first time in the whole Bible, we see all 3 members of the Trinity in 1 place at 1 time and acting independently yet toward the same purpose. God the Father is speaking from Heaven. God the Son, Jesus, is on earth receiving baptism, and God the Holy Spirit is descending as a dove. 3 separate persons, but only 1 God. But that's a whole other message!

## **V. Conclusion to the exposition**

To sum up what we have learned so far, I think a quote from The Pulpit Commentary says it best: "Now (Jesus) was revealed as the Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; the King to whom the Lord God would give the throne of His father David; the Prophet who would declare to the faithful all that we need to know, all that we can know while in the flesh," about God. In short: the Messiah had come.

## **VI. Application: the obedience of Jesus**

### **A. Introduction to application**

So now we turn to the application. If you've been asleep this is the part you should wake up for.

This is all good information to know, but how do we apply this awesome part of God's word? James tells us, "*Do not merely listen to the word...Do what it says.*" (James 1:22)

So do we all go and get baptized in water and the Holy Spirit? Well...yeah! If you've believed in Jesus and begun a relationship with Him but have never been baptized, well then you should because God commands us to. Pray about it, talk to Jonas about it.

Now what about being baptized in the Holy Spirit? When we do believe and accept what Jesus did for us, we receive the Holy Spirit. It's kind of a package deal, you accept one, you get the other. But Paul tells us that we can choose to be filled with the Spirit. He said, "*And do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18). Nobody gets drunk without first choosing to drink alcohol. So in the same way, we have a choice in whether we will live a life that is filled with the Spirit. And that is another sermon too.

But as I meditated on this passage, God kept bringing one word, one main theme to mind. Obedience. And when He told me that, I'll be honest I thought, "Oh great, not obedience, because I know I have to learn it before I can preach it to you." Some of you may feel the same way about obedience.

But I want you to see this because it is important. In John chapter 14 we read, "*Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching...He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."* I want you to see that obedience comes not just in doing the right thing, but from a heart full of love.

### **B. Jesus' obedience**

In this passage, obedience starts with Jesus. We know that he always obeyed the Father, that His very food was doing the will of God, but it wasn't just because obedience was right, it was because He loved God so much that He wanted to do whatever would

please God. Remember how joyful Jesus looked in the video when he came up out of the water? I think that joy came because He loved God and therefore He obeyed God and God gave Him a joyful heart.

So because Jesus always obeyed God, God must have told him to go and be baptized by John. Did God give him all the details? We don't know. Maybe not. But in any case 70 miles was a long way to go to get to where John was. And it was kind of out of his way. It wasn't really convenient.

### **C. Applied to us**

And the question God is asking me and the question I ask you is: [PAUSE] "How far are you willing to go to obey God?" A mile, 10 miles, across the street, to the next room in your home? Are you willing to go out of your way to obey, or do you only obey when it's convenient? Personally, I'm not sure I am very happy with my answer, because too often I have my own agenda, my own schedule and if God's will can fit into my schedule, cool. If not, well... Now, I didn't say I liked that answer, but it's an honest one. God calls us to obey Him. Not to live by our own agenda and try to fit Him in.

## **VII. Application: the obedience of John**

### **A. John's obedience**

Next, I see the obedience of John the Baptist. He was obeying God just by preaching the message God gave to Him to preach. But when Jesus came and asked to be baptized, John first said no. He basically said, "Uh, I'm not real comfortable with this. It is in line with what God has clearly told me to do, but I'm not sure I understand it." Something my wife pointed out to me is this: Jesus allowed John the opportunity to decide to obey. I find that amazing because Jesus was God, He could have just said, "Baptize me now." But He didn't. He encouraged John gently by saying, "*Let it be so now.*" The New King James says "*Permit it to be so now.*" God does the same for us. He doesn't force us to obey although He could, but He allows us to choose to obey out of a heart full of love for Him.

### **B. Applied to us**

So what about us? Has God ever asked you to do something that you weren't comfortable with? Maybe something you weren't sure about? His call was clear, but you just weren't sure you wanted to fulfill the role? I kind of feel that way here today. I didn't actually choose this role, and I am not always comfortable with it. But I believe wholeheartedly that it's a part of what God has called me to do. So here I am. What's He calling you too? Have you been obedient to His call? Is there something that God has called you to do that you haven't obeyed yet because you were uncomfortable or you didn't understand, or you weren't sure what God was doing? Can you hear Him say to you: "Permit it just now. Let it be so now. I know you don't fully understand, but just trust me and obey and watch me work through you." Obey and allow Him to work in your life.

## **VIII. Application: the results of obedience**

There is one more incidence of obedience in this passage and that is: the people who were baptized. And this leads us to the results of obedience: what happens when we obey. There are 2 results of obedience that we see here: the first is that when we obey, God shows up.

### **A. God shows up**

Last week we saw the people coming to John, confessing their sin, repenting, and being baptized. Isaiah 59:20 says, *“The Redeemer (which is a reference to the Messiah) will come to Zion, to those...who repent of their sins,” declares the LORD.* John said, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” Many people did.

And right in the very midst of those who had prepared their hearts, Jesus arrives. God shows up. Makes sense. Where else would He arrive but in the place where people have prepared their hearts to meet him? And God announces to His people: “The Messiah has come, the King of the Kingdom of Heaven is here.” The first result of obedience is that God sometimes opens our eyes to see Him in new and amazing ways.

## **B. God says “well done”**

The second result when we choose to obey is that God tells us he is pleased with us just like He told Jesus.

One of the parables that Jesus told talks about what happens after we die, about how we will stand before God to give an account of our life. It should be the goal of every one of us to live in such a way that when we get there we will hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21-23). But I would suggest that if we haven’t heard God say that to us along the way, we probably shouldn’t expect to hear it at the end.

We need to always examine our heart and make sure that we are being obedient to God in every way. We need to read the Bible, his written word, and listen to Him and make sure our lives are in line with what he desires.

## **CONCLUSION**

I want to encourage you if you are struggling with an issue of obedience to God: don’t focus so much on obeying each and every command of God, let your focus be on loving Him. When we live a life of getting to know God, we can’t help but love Him, and when we love Him we will want to obey. Let your obedience flow from a heart full of love for God.

This morning we have looked at some ways that the baptism of Jesus fits into God’s big picture. And we have looked at some ways that we can apply the examples of obedience that we see in Jesus, John and the people to our own lives. In just a few minutes you will get some time to listen to and respond to God concerning obedience as you prepare your hearts for Communion. Maybe there is some specific way that He is calling you to obedience in your life today or this week. Maybe you just need to spend a little time with Him to solidify that commitment to obey.

I want to end with a story. It’s the story of the pastor of the largest church in the world which is in Seoul, Korea. It’s called the Yoido Full Gospel Church. The church today has over 750,000 members and yes they have a lot of small groups. But people are always asking the pastor, Dr. Cho, “How did you do it? How did you affect so many people with the good news of Jesus Christ? How did you grow a church so large.” And his response is always, “I pray and obey.” And they say, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, but what is your method? Which church growth seminar did you attend? What’s your secret?” And he replies simply, “I pray and obey”.

Are we willing to let our Christian life be that simple? To just pray and obey? Pray and obey. Pray and obey.