

Imagine preparing a meal for royalty. You have gone to great lengths to organize and order the event. The King's chair has been positioned perfectly at the head of the table, the banquet hall is fixed and ready for his arrival. The kitchen staff is busy and bustling as they put the finishing touches on the preparation. Suddenly, the King, the one who you have been anticipating and preparing for, comes in adorned with an apron and taps you on the shoulder and says, "What can I do to help?" Would you be dazed, confused? So was John as Jesus came to be baptized by him.

Let's read the text together starting in verse 11.

John the Baptist is a popular preacher, but he knows that his ministry and mission is to give way to one who is more significant. John baptizes with water, the one coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. John calls for repentance, Jesus seals with the Spirit. John is the messenger, Jesus is the message.

I love the way that Matthew is teaching us Christ. We see this amazing tapestry of providence in the birth narrative; we see this long expected child receiving the adoration of nations; we see this child fleeing for his life because a price has been put on his head; and then we see him settling in a quaint little place of insignificance, Nazareth. Now we see him showing up to an evangelist's revival meeting to be baptized.

This is the first time we see Jesus publicly. In this moment, Jesus is giving a glimpse of his ministry, is revealing the way in which he will accomplish his rescue mission of redemption and reconciliation through his identifying himself with the very ones that he has come to save. No wonder the early church when they were reflecting on the life and ministry of Jesus said that he came for our sake and for our salvation.

There is one particular phrase that catches our attention as we read about this significant event (this event is significant not only in the life of our Lord but a significant event in our life as well). In verse 15, as John is resisting Jesus, we see Jesus saying that doing this "is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

So, today from this text I want us to learn 4 ways that Jesus fulfills all righteousness. But before we begin such a glorious look into the text, we need to ask ourselves the preliminary question: What on earth do we mean when we say fulfill all righteousness? Briefly let me say a few things about what we know already from the Bible at this point:

There is a God who created us for fellowship with himself. This fellowship was contingent upon our walking with him (righteousness). We fell out of fellowship with him when we sinned. Our sinning today serves as a testimony to the first time that sin entered the world. There is now a void in each heart as we try to please God but can't. We need a Savior and Jesus has come as our Savior. Jesus has come to be our righteousness for us. Jesus has come to fulfill righteousness. How does he do it? This text tells us at least four things.

1. Jesus Fulfills All Righteousness By Coming To Us (13)

Right after we see John exalting the one coming, he comes. Notice the simple way the text reads: Jesus comes to John. Remember John's purpose, John was a man who was sent from God who was to bear witness of the one coming. Right away from the text we see Jesus coming from Galilee to the Jordan to John. Remember that John is in the wilderness of Judea, John is in a desolate place for a purpose. His message in every way is to have people hope for a better day, a brighter land, a new exodus that will lead the people of God into the Promised Land.

There is a great separation between God and us, a separation wider than east is to west. Without him, without his presence, there is nothing but desolation and wilderness. You and I are left hopeless without his intervention, hopeless without his coming to us, and thankfully he has come to where we are so that he could take us to the heights of his perfection. It is a small point but the most significant point going forward - God has taken the initiative to come to us. Any barriers that existed between us and him are torn down by his coming to us.

But look at the strange way that he came to us. Look at the next phrase at the end of verse 13 - *to be baptized by him*.

2. Jesus Fulfills All Righteousness By Identifying With Us (13-15)

His identifying with us is the stumbling block of the gospel. Every cult, every false religion, every heresy all falls at the same point in answer to the question, "Who is Jesus?" Some people prefer the Jesus who is like God but not really God. Some people like the Jesus who is totally God but not totally man. Some people like the Jesus who is a good teacher, or good example. But the Jesus who saves is the eternal Word of God, God's eternal Son, made flesh for our sake and our salvation.

This Jesus, the Jesus of the text is the one that fulfills all righteousness. No other Jesus. Remember what Peter said before the council in Jerusalem, *This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:11-12)

Jesus came to save not by standing over us but by standing beside us. Jesus could have been standing in the water calling people to repent, but instead he takes his place in line and is numbered with the transgressors (Is. 53:12) though he himself had no transgression of his own.

In doing this he is offering us himself for our salvation.

3. Jesus Fulfills All Righteousness By Being Our Salvation (15)

I want you to pay close attention to the way this point is written down. Yes he saves us, but it's how he saves us that means we are saved - He is our salvation.

Just like John there may be some who don't want this, but trust what Jesus says, we need this so that all righteousness may be fulfilled. Remember what we said earlier about fulfilling all righteousness.

All people have one major thing in common - we all need salvation. Every person is created in the image of God and has the capacity for fellowship with God. But that capacity have been damaged and so we need the image of God restored.

Righteousness is lacking and what is lacking needs to be not lacking - righteousness needs to be fulfilled.

So Jesus has come to fulfill all righteousness but notice, in the text, what it is that Jesus says is the way that he will fulfill all righteousness - baptism. What on earth is baptism?

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 10 to find out. 1 Cor 10:2: *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea* - What? Moses parting the Red Sea is paired with Baptism? The Exodus was a major salvation event in the Old Testament, a major but not the only one. Can you think of what the other one would be?

Let's now go to 1 Peter 3:18-22: *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through*

water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Noah and Baptism?

Baptism is a significant picture of the saving acts of God. Jesus is getting into the waters not only identifying with the people who need saving but he is identifying himself with all the saving acts of God. His water baptism is anticipating the way that he will save. How does he save? Through a Cross. But listen to the way that he refers to his own death: Mark 10:38 - *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "**You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?**" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."*

He takes John's baptism identify with us, we take his baptism to identify with him. Baptism is a picture of the savings acts of God. Think about it:

Because he has been baptized as a picture of his saving acts and because he has been crucified on the Cross and risen again, how do you and I now view baptism? Romans 6:3-4 - *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

Jesus is the one person who both represents us and raises us up. This is why HE, the Eternal Son who became Incarnate came. This is why we need HIM for salvation. We were left powerless over death so we needed the one to come with the power to both taste death and undo death. He defeated death for all eternity, and even now as we see death in its own death throes as those who believe in him still die we show up to the funeral and sing "Victory in Jesus." Why? Because he has come to fulfill all righteousness.

Which leads us to our next point. Look at the text. In the text there are clues to what Jesus' coming has done. Look at verses 16-17:

4. Jesus Fulfills All Righteousness By Making A Way For Us To Be With God (16-17)

The phrase "the heavens were opened" is such a strange phrase. What on earth does this mean? How are the heavens opened? I believe this is telling us a significant point: The barriers between man and God are going down by the ministry of the Son who has come to reveal heaven to us.

The only way for the barrier to be removed is by doing something that had never been done before - this is what Jesus is doing. Jesus is recreating, or making all things new. Look at the text. The Spirit of God is hovering over the waters and coming to rest of Jesus. Does this sound like anything we have ever heard before?

In Genesis 1:2 we see the Spirit hovering over the waters of creation

In Genesis 8:8-12 we see Noah releasing a dove over the waters of the new creation. The dove does not come back the second time because he had found a place to rest.

Jesus is the way God is making all things new. No wonder the voice from heaven says what it says. Only Jesus can do this. Why does Jesus receive the Spirit? He receives the Spirit so that he can give the Spirit. Who does he give the Spirit to? Those with whom he is pleased with. How do you please God? You have to be righteous. How do we become righteous? Faith, believe.

Do you believe this morning? Do you believe that there is a God in heaven who sent his son who without ceasing to be what he was he became what he was not so that he could save you?