

Title: The Incredible Pleasure of God  
Text: Matthew 3.13-17  
Theme: The pleasure of the Father in the obedience of the Son  
Series: Matthew #8  
Prop Stmtnt: The baptism of Jesus put the pleasure of God on full display!

The baptism of Christ by John the Baptist comes at the end of the shortest chapter in Matthew's gospel. But these five verses are staggering. In them we are introduced to two critical and foundational truths of the gospel: the ministry of Christ to fulfill all righteousness and the Trinity. We also learn about the baptism and the anointing of Christ. There is so much packed into this simple account. Let's look at what is going on.

John the Baptist is a prophet and the cousin of Jesus. He seems to have no fear. He needs no affirmation from the rich and powerful, whether they be religious or political. He calls it like it is and the spiritual life of the nation is dark. John's message, as you looked at last week, is marked by calling people to repent of their sins. And John is using as motivation, the fact that the Messiah is about to appear on the scene, as further incentive to repent. John tells them that he is simply baptizing with water, but the Mighty One is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. That sounds powerful, and it is. Furthermore, the Messiah is coming to clean house (12), so you better get ready. People were taking this message to heart and were confessing and repenting of their sins. Those who were in agreement with John's message and wanted to publicly identify themselves as a sin confessor and repenter were baptized by John.

So, here is the scene. John is by (perhaps in) the Jordan River and is preaching to the people, who have come to hear what he has to say. The ones, who agree with him, go out into the river with him and are baptized by him in the river. This immersion (that is what baptism means) into and then up out of the water, symbolizes their cleansing because they have confessed and repented of their sin. The ministry of John is obviously having an impact. The gospels speak about the fact that crowds of people were going out to see what is going on and many of them are convicted by the message that John is preaching. And so, the people line up to get baptized. One by one they go out to John into the river. The Jordan River may seem spiritual and nostalgic to us, but the actual river is very dirty. This was true back in 2 Kings 5 and remains true to this day. A friend of mine was just there and he was amazed at the size of the water rats in this river. I am guessing that this just adds to the sense of humility. (Mark says that they were confessing their sins.) In line to get baptized, is a rather plain and ordinary man about 30 years of age. His turn is next. He has walked many miles, apparently alone, to come here, for this purpose. No one knows who he is. He has no sin to confess. John is taken back.

Read Text:

1. **Jesus had to get baptized by John...** (13)

V.13 is very clear. Jesus came to the Jordan (presumably east of Jerusalem) where John was baptizing in order *to be* baptized by John. That brings up a couple of background questions that relate to the question of why Jesus intentionally was baptized by John.

### **A. What is baptism?**

Simply put, it is a public religious ritual. It is a public religious act that has spiritual significance that is determined by the reason a person is being baptized. Not all baptisms are the same. In this passage, people are being baptized by John because (and here is the significance of it) they are publicly declaring that they are in agreement with John and are willing to be known as such.

### **B. How is it to be done?**

It is to be done by immersion in water to people who are intentionally, deliberately, individually and publicly identifying themselves with the significance of the baptism. That is the only way that the Bible has ever understood and presented baptism. At the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus commands his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. These disciples are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The baptism that Jesus commanded has a different significance than the baptism that John was talking about. The people that John baptized were declaring their public agreement with John's message. The baptism that Jesus commanded was for people who were declaring their public agreement with the message of Jesus.

So, here is a question for you. If someone in the city of Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, after hearing Peter preach the gospel had already been baptized by John three years before, would that same person need to be baptized again? Absolutely! Their initial baptism was John's baptism, but it was not "believer's baptism" (that is a believer in Jesus) because the gospel was not yet revealed in its entirety. John did not baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Here is why this is so important for you to understand. In our culture, there is confusion over the purpose of baptism and over the means of baptism, because some religions have taken a biblical command and have made it into something that it is not. It is not sprinkling with water. It is not pouring with water. It is immersion into water. That is what the word actually means. That is how it was understood and practiced. Baptism is not done in order to wash away sin. It symbolizes the cleansing of sin, but it is not a work that one does in order to be cleansed. Baptism is not valid, and therefore does not fulfill the biblical definition of baptism if it is done to an infant because an infant is not willfully participating in it. Here is where things tend to get messy. If you were "baptized" as an infant, you were not baptized biblically because "infant baptism" is not legitimate according to the Bible. Now, here is where the issue tends to go emotional, right? Are you saying that if I was baptized as an infant, that that pretty white outfit that I wore, that

my mother wore at her baptism, that her mother wore at her baptism, that my great-grandmother sowed by hand, from thread that she made from cotton that she picked, from seed that she planted, from the ground that she plowed, from the land that my great-great grandfather fought for, that that baptism is invalid? Yes, because, the Bible does not rest upon your history or traditions. It is precisely this issue that caused so many people to be so angry with Jesus. History and traditions do not determine truth. History and traditions may be sentimental, but sentiment does not determine truth. So...

### C. **Why John?**

As we will see from the next couple of verses, Jesus had to be baptized by John because this was part of fulfilling his mission as the Messiah. In fact, the baptism of Jesus, by John was the means by which Jesus was not only publicly identifying himself as being in agreement with the message that John was preaching, but it was the point at which Jesus presented himself publicly as the Messiah.

John's message had two related themes: 1) Repent and 2) The Messiah is coming. Do you now see why Jesus was baptized? Even though he did not have anything to repent of, his ministry was to be counted and identified with those, like us, who do. And obviously, he was in full agreement with John's announcement that the Messiah was coming. As Jesus made it clear, the Messiah was here.

#### 2. ...**in order to fulfill all righteousness**... (14-15)

Jesus is both identifying himself with the people who are in need of confession and repentance and he is identifying himself as the Messiah. Even though John was preaching about the Messiah who was coming and was preaching about the need to confess and repent of sin, John had no idea that the Messiah would fulfill both aspects of that message. But, it obviously does not take John long to figure this out. In fact, the very next day, after Jesus is baptized, (John 1) John calls Jesus the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sin of the world. But, that is the next day. On this day, John is trying to figure out why Jesus wants to be baptized by John. For John, it was...

#### A. **Difficult to understand.** (14)

John refused to baptize the Pharisees and called them out as ones who were clearly not worthy of identifying with his message, but now John does not want to baptize Jesus, because John is not worthy of Christ. We do not know how John knows this. (According to John 1.31 and ff) John the Baptist does not yet know that Jesus is the Messiah. John was told by God, that the person, upon whom the Spirit of God descends and remains, is the one who will baptize others with fire. John has not seen this yet. So, John's hesitancy to baptize Jesus seems to be the result of not fully understanding the person and ministry of Christ. Yet, John, like others is about to discover who Jesus is, and why He is here.

What John does know is that he is in the presence of a man who is supremely righteous. This encounter reveals so much about the humility and sincerity of John and the supreme humility and righteousness of Christ.

From this point on, John's ministry is basically done. He has fulfilled what God called him to do. He was to prepare the way for the King. The King has come. John has done his job. His ministry, though important is not as important as Jesus. It is time to yield the floor to the King. John never seemed to fight this. He appeared to accept that his rather short life and ministry had done what he was called to do. In a couple of years, he would be executed for speaking the truth. Even when he was in prison awaiting his death, he did not fully understand how all of the pieces of the story fit together, but he would. For now, he simply needed to believe the King who told him to baptize him. But, how do you baptize Jesus? John was a sinner like us. He preached a faithful message, but John needed a Savior like we do and here Jesus is standing next to him, asking him to baptize him. This is the one whom Isaiah saw on the throne. This is the Holy of Holies wrapped in human flesh standing next to him in the dirty Jordan River asking for John to touch him and physically place him into the water in such a way that it would appear that John had a measure of influence over this man, when in reality myriads of angels were at the beckoned call of Christ. No wonder John balked. It was time!

**A. It was time (15a)**

But Jesus said, "Let it be so for now!" which makes clear that it is God's will for Christ to begin his ministry. There is a divine urgency placed upon John to do this. The silent years were over. The private life of Jesus was now gone. Here was the point of no return. The days of anonymity were concluded. Jesus came to this point in order to present himself as the representative of man and the representative of God, all in the same person.

**B. It was God's purpose (15b)**

While he did not understand everything, he understood that this did not seem right. Jesus did not need John; John needed Jesus. In reality, Jesus needed John to baptize him, because John needed Jesus. John, like you and me, needed a Savior who could save us from our sin. In order for Jesus to completely, decisively, finally, thoroughly save us from our sin, Jesus had to be a perfect sacrifice for us. What made him a perfect sacrifice? What made him the perfect payment? There are two parts to that answer. He had to be perfectly sinless, in the sense that never committed a sin, and he had to be perfectly sinless in the sense that he never failed to do anything that he needed to do. It was not enough for him to not lie; he had to speak the truth. It was not enough for him not to steal, he had to be generous. In order to be a perfect sacrifice, he had to live in our place in such a perfect way that he had to do every single righteous thing that was needed so that he could provide a payment that so perfectly complete that there was nothing left for anyone else to pay. Here Jesus is doing that! He is humbling himself. He is identifying himself with lowly broken sinners who can only confess their sin. He is going into the river as one of us and being immersed into water as one of us.

But, there is more. What happens in the beginning of chapter 4? Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. For 40 days, he does not eat. What does that remind you of? Do you see how this helps us understand his baptism? Here is another example of how Christ relived the history of Israel. Israel went into and came out of Egypt, so did Jesus. Israel went into and out of the Red Sea and then into the wilderness for 40 years where she was tempted and tested. So did Jesus. The baptism of Jesus was part of Jesus reliving the history of Israel. He did everything that you were supposed to do and did not. He did everything Israel was supposed to do and did not. He did everything that his Father called him to do, perfectly.

The King commanded his cousin, his subject, his kin, to baptize him because it was fitting *“for us”* to fulfill all righteousness. John was commanded to participate in the plan of God that would be used by God to bring about our salvation. “Then he consented.” (16) *“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold (BAM! A favorite word of Matthew’s; meaning, what happens now is a really big deal!!) the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”*

### 3. ...and display the pleasure of God. (16-17)

This is really astounding. Here, in this moment, all of history is captured. *“The heavens were opened to him”!* For a moment, heaven came to earth, and it happened because of Jesus. That is the story of the Bible, because that is THE story of all of life, history and creation. This is the whole point. The Bible opens with the Spirit of God descending and hovering and then with God speaking. And here, the Spirit descends and God speaks and says, “This is the One I love. This is the One who pleases me. In fact, I am pleased because of Him. He does it all! It is a declaration of the pleasure of God...

#### A. **In the obedience of the Son.**

The Father is so pleased with his Son, he announces it! At this point in the story, we do not know why this is so important, but we find out later in the Bible that when we, as sinners trust in Jesus, we get credit for his life and death. Everything that he did is credited to our account. Which means, since the obedience of the Son brings the Father so much pleasure, and if you, by faith alone, are credited with his obedience, then, you bring the Father pleasure. God delights in you because He delights in His Son. What exactly are you trying to prove? There is so much to say about that. But let’s move on. The pleasure of God is also seen . . .

#### B. **In the anointing of the Son.**

What is happening here? The Spirit of God descends on Jesus. Does that mean that Jesus was without the Spirit before hand? No! In the Old Testament, whenever God appointed a judge to lead, or a king to rule, that one was anointed with oil. He was designated not only as the one who represented God, but the ruler pointed forward to the Messiah. Israel was a theocracy. God ruled Israel by means of a human ruler. Therefore, the anointing was the marking of the one who was set apart by God to rule his people. That is exactly what happens here. Only here, oil is not used as a symbol of the Spirit of God, the actual Spirit appears because this king is not a representative, He is the real One.

### C. In the revelation of the Trinity.

This passage does not tell us everything about the Triune God, but it does reveal that God is a tri-unity; that is, God is One being, comprised of three persons whose essence, harmony, unity and purpose is absolutely perfect and therefore, absolutely and infinitely good and pleasurable. When the Father said, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" He was at once revealing how it is that we can be saved from our sin and he was revealing at the same time what God is like. We can only be saved from our sin because Jesus perfectly pleased the Father in our place and therefore was able to appease his righteous wrath (propitiate) through his death on the cross. At the same time, for God to say "*I am well pleased*" not only means that God is capable of pleasure and is therefore capable of being pleased, but because of the infinite worth of the obedience of Jesus, this means that God is infinitely pleased.

Think of someone who is never pleased. No matter what, this person always finds fault. By the way, if your kids are thinking of you right now, there is some serious soul work that needs to be done in your heart. How attractive and pleasant is it to be around someone who is never pleased? To quote that famous theologian, Johnny Norbeck, "Stick a fork in my eye!" Do you realize what a deformed picture of God you put on display when your fundamental disposition in life is being unsatisfied? God's fundamental disposition is NOT displeasure. God is fundamentally pleasurable and therefore joyful! You do not have work with all that you have to try to coax God to smile. Oh no! God's glory is displayed through His pleasure. His pleasure as God is what motivated him to create the universe. Therefore (and this is a really big therefore), God's ultimate motivation for our faith, love, worship and obedience is not his displeasure, but his pleasure! ("*I always do the things that are pleasing to him.*" John 8.29) God's delight as God is why He is so generous with his grace.

This truth is the grounding of the gospel. Gospel means "good news." If the news is truly good, then it has to be the source of pleasure and delight. What we learn from the announcement of God the Father is that he is pleased with his son. In fact, he is well pleased with his son. If God the Father simply tolerated his Son, this would not be good

news. If God the Father were estranged from his Son, this would not be good news. If God the Father were ticked off, or disappointed in, or frustrated with his Son, this would not be good news. In fact, if God was unhappy at all as God, then there is no good news, because no one wants to go on a trip with unhappy parents or on vacation with grumpy grandparents. Meaning, no one wants to spend eternity with God, if God is unhappy. However, if God is delighted, and if God is absolutely full of delight as God, and is supremely pleased as God, then spending eternity with an infinitely satisfied God is the greatest news of all! Just about the worst thing that you can imagine is having to be with someone who is never satisfied, no matter what! Can you imagine what sheer delight and undiluted, extravagant pleasure awaits us in eternity with the infinite God, who is infinitely pleased with the perfection of his Son, that you get credit for? Beloved, rest in that! Behold your God! This is who He is. Accept it. Revel in it. Delight in Him. He delights in you because He delights in Christ. He delights in you not because we are worthy of his delight but because he gets to showcase the glory of his grace!

The delight that God has is what makes him so attractive. Heaven is not attractive primarily because “anything is better than Hell.” Heaven is not attractive primarily because people you care about are there. Seriously, there are a lot of people that you care about who drive you crazy. If you are trapped in a relationship forever with someone who drives you crazy, how great is that, even if it is better than hell? No, eternity with God is supremely attractive because God, who is supremely pleased, is there. His joy is what makes eternity so desirable. Jesus spoke of the servant who was told, “*Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master.*” So, when I say that God is the source of all joy and the grounding of all pleasure, I mean that the relationship that God enjoys as God is the source of all joy and the grounding of all pleasure. What God enjoys as God is infinite joy, so that there is plenty of pleasure to share. It cannot be exhausted.

Here, God, the Father is declaring to us that He is pleased with his Son. At this point, we do not yet realize that the pleasure of the Father in His Son becomes the very grounding of our justification. We will discover this in due time. What is evident now, is that the Sovereign God of the universe is declaring to his universe what he deems is the most pleasurable, admirable, esteem-able, and delightful being in the universe: namely, the Son! The glad worship of Jesus is the highest function and most glorious activity your being can perform. The worship, praise and exaltation of Jesus are the most unifying functions of your body and soul possible. It is truly a taste of the very reason for your creation.