

The Obedient Son

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Bible Verse: Matthew 3:13-17
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Our message this morning comes from the gospel of Matthew 3, and I invite you to turn there with me. And today you may hear some things that, especially if you haven't been at our church for very long, that may sound new to your ears. That's okay. We should want to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We should want to learn new things and not simply hear the same things over and over again but rather to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And that's what we endeavor to do today and as we do that, we're going to see what the ground of our salvation is, what the righteousness is that we rely upon in order to enter into the presence of God.

Last week, if you were with us, you'll remember that we celebrated the Lord's Table, and that's always a wonderful time at Truth Community Church. I know that the Lord has used it, our Communion services, at times to work deeply in the hearts of those that come to believe in him and so we're grateful for that. And we focused on the shed blood of Christ, how Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and that is a fitting theme to remember at Communion, to focus on his death and his shed blood. Today we're focusing on the significance of his life that he lived leading up to his death, and you're going to be encouraged and more deeply established in Christ as a result of being here this morning, and so I'm very glad that the Lord brought each one of you here. I consider you to be a gift of God to our church here this morning and I trust that God will use his word in your life as a gift to you to expand your understanding if you are a Christian, if you are not a Christian, that the Lord would convict you of your sin, your lostness, and how desperately you need the righteousness of Jesus Christ in order to redeem you from your many, many sins. You have come expecting, I trust, the Lord comes to you through his word now to present himself in love and grace and mercy and kindness and patience to call you to himself.

With those things in mind, let's look at Matthew 3 beginning in verse 13.

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up

from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Now this episode of the baptism of Jesus is a milestone in his life and it is a milestone in Matthew's gospel, and those two things go together. If you remember, we don't have time to review all of this and to read all of the Scripture that informs what I'm about to say, Matthew, by this point in his gospel, has covered the genealogy of Jesus Christ, and he has shown that Jesus Christ is in the ancestral lineage of King David and of Abraham. That's very significant, showing that Jesus is in the lineage of the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, that he is the fulfillment of all of the promises of God. And after the genealogy, we read of the birth of Christ in the remainder of chapter 1 and in chapter 2, and we are exposed to something very, very critical in chapter 1 that I want to turn your attention to. In verse 23, actually in verse 21 is where I really want to take your attention. As we're reading about this Christ and the angel is speaking to Joseph, he's speaking of Mary and says that she will bear a son, Matthew 1:21, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Jesus will save his people from their sins. Now look, that is like two great pillars, even though it's only one text, it's like a great magnificent entryway through which you go into a magnificent palace and you see the riches that are in all of the rooms. Everything that we read in what follows in the gospel of Matthew is to help us understand the nature and the means by which Jesus Christ saves his people from their sins. The whole point of the incarnation, the whole point of Christ's coming is that he would come to save his people from their sins, and all that he did in the course of his life, even in the days of obscurity before his public ministry, was all contributing to that mission of salvation that he was on.

Now, In order for the people of the time to recognize Jesus, God sent a messenger beforehand, prophesied in the book of Isaiah 40. This messenger's name was John the Baptist. Every one of the gospels speak about him. He's obviously of great importance. In Matthew's gospel, the ministry of John had been introduced in the prior 12 verses of chapter 3. And again, without looking at the text, what John the Baptist had been doing was he was calling sinners to repent and he was preparing the way for the Christ who would follow him and that had a very significant purpose. Because the Spirit of God was abiding upon him, even so much so that that John leapt in his mother's womb when the mother of our Lord spoke to Elizabeth and John heard the greeting and knew that the Lord was there and there was just this, there was this even within the womb, this responsiveness to Christ. God had set John apart from his mother's womb to have this ministry, this purpose of fulfillment and of preparing the way for Christ. It's remarkable to think about what a wonderful, what a wonderfully unique place that John held in redemptive history, kind of standing as a bridge between the Old and the New Testaments. But John, as he went out and he preached his message of repentance and his baptism of repentance, attracted crowds, here's the point, he attracted crowds and people were so captivated by his ministry that they started to wonder if he himself was the Christ. That's how great his power was, is how great the attention that was upon him. And

if you want to think in terms of stage production as an illustration, the spotlight was shining brightly on John the Baptist in a way that had not been true for the prior 400 years where there had been no revelation from God and the spotlight in a dark world was shining on John as he preached and he ministered as Scripture describes it. It's really cool. And what John does, what the purpose of John's ministry is and what he in effect does, is he takes, he puts his hands around that spotlight that's on him and he shifts it. Says, "I'm not the star of this show. There's one coming after me who's greater than me, so great that I'm not worthy to bow down and untie his sandal." He takes the spotlight and he shines it on the Lord Jesus Christ. God prepared him, everyone's looking on him, and then John says, "It's not me, it's him," which is kind of the attitude of every true Christian. And so John had been calling sinners to repent, to bring forth fruit in their life, great attention is brought on him so that he can pass the mantle, as it were, onto the only one who is worthy of it, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So he's baptizing and now, in the text that we have, here in Matthew 3, John has a candidate for baptism that is unlike any other. This is a momentous occasion in the ministry of Christ for reasons that I will show you. And I want to kind of structure this around two primary points here this morning, what we're going to look at. I want you to understand the crucial nature of Jesus' baptism and then secondly, the crucial purpose of Jesus' baptism. The nature of his baptism, the purpose of his baptism. And so here in point number one, we look at the crucial nature of Jesus' baptism as we come to this text that I read just a few moments ago. Let's enter into it. It's a dramatic text.

Jesus in verse 13 comes to John to be baptized by him. They're at the Jordan River. And immediately John recognizes that there's an incongruity in this moment. He hesitates to baptize Jesus. Look at verse 14. "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?'" Now look, the message of John the Baptist was a message of repentance from sin. Look up at verse 11 where he says this. Actually go up to verse 8, we'll see it twice. He speaks to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He calls them a brood of vipers in verse 7, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." You sinful, wicked, religious leaders, you need to repent and to bear fruit in keeping with repentance, because until now your teaching and your so-called ministry has been nothing but a rattlesnake's fangs sunk into the flesh of people. He goes on, verse 11, he says, "'I baptize you with water for repentance.'" And so there's this emphasis of turning away from sin that is the primary focus and the message of his ministry and the purpose of his baptism is that people need to repent in order to prepare their souls for the coming of the kingdom of God. And so repentance, repentance, while simultaneously pointing to one who is to come, verse 11, "'I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.'" And he'll be the one who sifts the people of God. So it's a message of repentance.

Now, Jesus shows up to John and says, in effect, by his presence he's saying, "I am here to submit to this baptism that signifies repentance from sins." Here's the problem, beloved: why does the true Messiah come for a baptism of repentance? Why is the perfectly righteous Son of God here to submit to an ordinance like that? At first look,

when you realize who Christ is, this one who's mightier than John, this one who we just saw in Matthew 1:21, came to save his people from their sins, this one who is in the lineage of Abraham and David and who is the rightful heir to the throne of David as king of Israel, why is he here for a baptism that signifies repentance from sin? This is a real problem, beloved. Jesus Christ was holy and undefiled, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Here's the point that you must grasp hold of as we consider the crucial nature of his baptism: Jesus Christ had no sins whatsoever of his own that needed repentance. He didn't need to repent. He had never sinned and he never would and he never could. And yet, he insists on undergoing the baptism. Look at verse 15 with me again. John would have prevented him. John says, "Why are you here? This should be completely reversed. You should be baptizing me and you're saying I should baptize you?" But Jesus answered him, verse 15, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented." And John baptized him.

And so something really magnificent and significant is going on here as shown by the incongruity of the moment, shows us the crucial nature of the baptism. There's something else that I want to point you out, and this is all still kind of by way of just getting familiar with the passage and what's happening, is that whatever's happening here is something of great Trinitarian significance because God the Father speaks publicly, audibly into this situation as we read in verse 17 where Matthew records a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." That is the voice of God the Father looking down on this moment on earth and saying, "This is pleasing to me. This is exactly what I want." And so God the Father makes himself known here. Of course, you have the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, recognized by the Father. I mean, we know it's God the Father because he's speaking about his Son, who has a Son but the Father? So the Father, the Son is here, and even the Spirit of God, the third member of the ineffably blessed Godhead, we see in verse 16, "he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him." And so there's so much coming together in this one great moment. Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in John the Baptist and his ministry. The entrance of Jesus into his public ministry is happening here. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are speaking. There's something of great supernatural consequence here. You could never overestimate the significance of what we're considering here this morning by the grace of the Spirit. And so, whatever is happening here in Matthew 3, beloved, is something that is greatly, eternally significant in the redemptive plan of God.

Now, before we consider our text in greater detail, and because I've made such a point of saying how significant this is, I want to show you from a couple of other passages to show you that Scripture itself points back to this and speaks to the great significance of the baptism of Christ. So turn to the book of Acts, 1, with me for just a moment. As we consider these things, we are gradually and slowly building up momentum for things that are going to be said later. There is an accumulating momentum, an accumulating significance and power that is coming upon us as we consider this theme from Scripture, so I say that just to encourage you to stay with me, even if you don't immediately see why this is so important as you're sitting there in this moment, stay with me because it's going to become very significant as you'll see if you just stay with the flow of what Scripture has for us here today.

So in Acts chapter 1, this is after the ascension, we're going to look at verses 21 and 22, after the ascension of Christ, the group of disciples known as the apostles say, "We have a vacancy." Judas had betrayed Christ, he'd gone out and committed suicide, and entered into perdition. Now they had a vacancy in the twelve, and so they needed to fill it and the question is, who's going to fulfill it? Well, there were some qualifications that needed to be in place. We read in verse 20, at the end there, "Let another take his office," and they applied that to Judas. The office that Judas held, Judas Iscariot, now needs to be filled by someone else as they enter into the fullness of apostolic ministry after the resurrection of Christ. And now what Peter says is that here's the qualifications, here's the kind of man that we're looking for. "So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." We need someone who saw everything essential from the beginning. And what was the beginning that they must have witnessed? Verse 22, "beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us--one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." To be an apostle, you had to not only be a witness to the resurrection of Christ, you needed to be a witness to the baptism, that you had to be associated with it from that beginning.

Now look over at Acts 10 with me, where Peter is again speaking, describing and now moving from that small circle of 120 Jews in the Upper Room before the fall of the Spirit in Acts 1. I guess they were in the Upper Room in Acts 2, but that time frame where it's the Jews in focus. Now in Acts 10, the ministry is expanding to the Gentiles. Peter is in front of a Gentile gathering to speak about the Lord to them, and he says in Acts 10:34, we're going to read a few verses here. "So Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),' notice that Peter's obviously talking about the nation of Israel. Israel did not somehow morph into the church and go away. Peter recognizes the distinction as he's talking to Gentiles, "the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee," here it is, "after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear."

Here's the point, beloved, as Peter is preaching the gospel for the first time to the Gentiles, he includes the baptism of Jesus as significant in the account that he was responsible to give to them. When it came time to fill an apostolic office, they had to have seen, they had to be a witness to the baptism of John. And so you have this crucial nature of the baptism to the apostolic office. It's referred to, the baptism, in the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles, and then all the way through the ascension. And so the baptism and the ascension function as bookends to the public ministry of Jesus Christ. It's very crucial. This is the starting point of Christ publicly fulfilling that

redemptive mission that Matthew alluded to in chapter 1 by which he would save his people from their sins. Okay, so it's crucial in nature.

Now, let's go to point number two here: the crucial purpose of Jesus' baptism. Jesus, go back to Matthew 3, back to Matthew 3, Jesus explains the purpose of the baptism when John hesitates and asks him, "Why are you here? Lord, you know you have no sin. You know that I'm doing a baptism for repentance from sin. What are you doing here?" From John's perspective, he says, "We've got to put a stop to this." But Jesus explains it in verse 15, and this is where we need to really zero our attention on. "Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.'" Somehow this baptism of Jesus fulfills righteousness in a way that would not otherwise have been accomplished. "It is fitting" indicates that this occasion, Jesus says, "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness," that verb "it is fitting" indicates that this occasion is suitable to fulfill and achieve a goal that transcends the moment in the water itself. "It's fitting. It's suitable. This is a good thing, John, even if you don't fully grasp it right now." Then "to fulfill all righteousness," to fulfill it, fulfill means to perform something completely, to fill it out, something that has to be completed, carried out, or accomplished. He says, "John, what we are doing here is suitable to the goal of carrying out righteousness all the way to the end." And so, just to summarize here, because I don't want anybody to get lost in the development of the argument here, Jesus tells John it's suitable for him to baptize Christ. "It's suitable for you to baptize me, John, because in this moment we have a crucial purpose to accomplish, to achieve. We have to carry out righteousness."

Now, if you just stopped at the end of chapter 3, you would be understandably perplexed by what that could possibly mean. There's no further explanation that's made here. Jesus doesn't say how this baptism fulfills righteousness, he just says that it does. And if you read the different commentators that have written on this, you can find all kinds of speculations about what Jesus meant, and we're not going to waste our time pursuing that. But you and I should be able to agree on one thing together at this point in the message, we should be able to agree on one thing clearly, certainly, and then build from there. Here's what we can agree on. So, very important. So incredibly, incredibly important, beloved, and there are theology professors who contradict and miss this and have done great harm to the church of Christ by straying on this very point or ignoring this point that I'm about to make to you. Jesus Christ did not need to be baptized to further his own righteousness. Jesus Christ was already perfect. He was already sinless. There was nothing that that baptism did that made Christ more righteous after he went under the water than before he entered into it. Christ did not need to be baptized for his own sake, all right? He did not need to be baptized in order to fulfill righteousness, his own righteousness, or to somehow repent from his own sins. He didn't need it for himself because he was already righteous and had nothing from which to repent. That should be clear and obvious to you, and if you have that in mind, then you can start to ask and explore other questions.

Now, we get some help on the meaning from Matthew 5:17, if you'll turn there with me. We're in the middle of, on Tuesdays we've been teaching through the Sermon on the Mount, and we're actually right at verse 17 where we'll pick it up when we get back to the

Sermon on the Mount down the road. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says something further about his purpose. His purpose was that the big overarching thing of his incarnation, the whole purpose of it is that he would save his people from their sins and we interpret everything in light of that. In his baptism, he says it's necessary for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness but there's no other explanation. Well, you keep on reading in the gospel of Matthew. You know, one of the main points of biblical interpretation is that you understand a text in its context. Now not every text in the immediate context has clarifying perspective so that you can know for sure what's being said and so if that's the case, then you keep reading and you consider what the rest of the book in which the verse appears says to help you understand that which initially may be cloudy in your understanding. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. He was baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness. Now, here in Matthew 5:17, we read this. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." He said, and you see that word "fulfill." He came, chapter 3, verse 15, we need to do this baptism to fulfill all righteousness. Now we see a lexical link that says, "I haven't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, I've come to fulfill them."

So Jesus somehow came to fulfill the law and the prophets with precision. He will fulfill the smallest letter and stroke. Look at verse 18. There won't be one letter of the Hebrew alphabet disjointed, out of place, by the time Jesus is done. Everything will stand upright and be completely fulfilled. Verse 18, Jesus said, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." If you were to put this in colloquial English language, we'd say every I will be dotted, every T will be crossed. There won't be any, not even the slightest adjustment or mistake. Jesus Christ came to do what the Old Testament had in mind and it couldn't be any other way because the law cannot be abolished. Jesus did not come to set aside the law of Moses. Jesus did not come to set aside the Old Testament. He came to fulfill it. He came to accomplish everything that the Old Testament had in mind. But again, beloved, he did not need to do this personally for himself. He is eternal God. He is eternally righteous. He is the author of the law. He is the keeper par excellence of the law. So he didn't need it personally for himself and so, beloved, for whom is he doing this? For whom did Jesus submit to the baptism of John? For whom did Jesus keep the law? That's the question.

Look at another text from Matthew's gospel. Go to Matthew 20 with me. And if you can just kind of click four different texts from Matthew in your mind, this will really help. Matthew 1:21, came to save his people from their sins. Matthew 3:15, fulfilling all righteousness. Matthew 5:17, fulfill the law and the prophets, not abolish them but to fulfill them completely. And now Matthew 20:28. We'll actually start in verse 25, Matthew 20:25. "Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.'" Jesus says greatness in the kingdom is shown by serving others, "and whoever would be first among you must be your slave," verse 27, verse 28 now, "even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus says, "I'm here in order to

serve." Now by the time he says this, deep into his public ministry, you are to be remembering what came beforehand. He came to save his people from their sins. He came to obey the law perfectly. And as a result of this, beloved, here's what we see in verse 28. He's saying, "I came on a mission of redemption." And we've almost come full circle to chapter 1, verse 21, he came to save his people from their sins. Verse 28, he says, "I came to give my life as a ransom for many." That perfect, righteous life would be offered up in order to save his people from their sins.

And now, beloved, as part of that redemptive mission for which he was sent to save his people from their sins, we see as part of that mission, he rendered perfect obedience to the law of God in everything that he did. He didn't need to do it for himself and why did he do it? He did it because he was serving and he was serving his people. He rendered obedience to the law not to achieve his own righteousness, but he did it as our representative, as for his people he obeyed the law. His people were required to keep the law of God with perfection. Matthew 5:48, "you shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," and everyone since Adam has been a complete utter failure at keeping the law of God and yet that's what we are required to offer to God if we are to go into heaven. We can't do that on our own and so what Christ is doing in his baptism is woven together with the entire redemptive mission that he came to fulfill the law as a service for his people. He obeys the law in order to benefit and to serve others.

And those of us that are in Christ, now stay with me because this just gets really, really magnificent, Scripture says that believers are in union with Christ, that we share in the benefit of all that he has done. Jesus was born as a Jew with responsibility to obey the law. In Galatians 4:4-5, we read that he was born of a woman, born under the law in order that he might redeem those who were under the law. Let's look at Galatians 4, just so you can see that with your own eyes. Galatians 4:4-5, we read that "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." He's born under the law, born with an obligation to keep the law, which he does, and he does that in order to redeem those who are under the law but failed. And so throughout his life, Jesus Christ obeyed the law perfectly. Even in his youth, Scripture says that he lived in submission to his parents, and thus redeems even young people from their sins of disobedience. And throughout Scripture, we read about his perfect, impeccable righteousness. John 8:46, Jesus says, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" Says it to his enemies, if they had anything on him, they would have brought it forth. They had nothing to say. Hebrews 4:15 says that Christ has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Now, why does that matter to us? Look at Romans 3. So turn back in your Bibles to Romans 3. In the first two chapters of Romans, Paul explains the wrath of God being all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men and he shows that it's a universal condemnation. Gentiles are condemned, which you would expect because they're godless pagans outside the promises, but Jews are also completely condemned by the law of God, which was news to them. Now in chapter 3, chapter 3 he's pulling his argument together and what we read in this, in chapter 3, verse 9, is, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not

at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'" So that when we come to verse 19 of Romans 3, we read, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Here's the problem, beloved, and it's a problem that every one of us has in this room, everyone that will ever come under the sound of this message, and everyone that will never come under the sound of this message, it's true of every single member of the human race since the time of Adam until today and until the return of Christ. Our problem is that you and I, we have not kept the law and as a result of that, we are under condemnation. The law requires perfect obedience to everything that it commands and everything that it prohibits. The law requires punishment for every transgression of that law and because of our universal guilt, there is nothing that any of us can say in response to the demands of the law of God. Let that sink in. The law requires perfect obedience, and we haven't given it and the justice of God, which undergirds the law, must be satisfied before anyone can enter into his holy presence. The law makes positive demands upon us that we should do certain things. The law prohibits us from doing other things. "You shall not commit murder. You shall not lie. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not even covet to do such things. You must honor your parents." And so the law demands that we obey its positive precepts and it also demands that we suffer its penalty. That's the way God has structured the moral universe. And before the law of God, you have duties to perform with utter perfection throughout all of your life without exception. You must render a perfect obedience to it or you will be condemned and having sinned, you have a debt to pay to God and without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

Oh beloved, oh beloved, if we could just gather around these things and realize how desperately sad and lost our condition is as members of the human race. God requires all of this and you and I have no obedience of our own to offer to him. We've broken his law instead. You lack the perfection of obedience that he requires and now that you have sinned you cannot pay what you owe him because to break the eternal law of an eternal God requires an eternal penalty, and you as a finite sinful creature can't even begin to pay it. You can cry and weep and try to avoid the issue, you can do all kinds of things to evade it, but it all comes back to this central point, we stand guilty and condemned before God on every aspect of his law. James 2 says, James 2 says, he who breaks the law in one point has broken all of it. The law of God is like a beautiful pane of glass and is a unit like that, and just one sin is like taking a rock and hurling it through that pane of glass and it shatters and there's no way to recover it. That's you and me. We are that broken pane of glass that cannot be repaired on our own. And so, beloved, when we talk about the perfect obedience of Christ, the perfect sacrifice of Christ, the fullness of what he did collectively in his life on earth, we start to understand when we see that he came to serve his people, he came to save his people, that what Christ was doing on behalf of his people

was something that they never could have done on their own in order to satisfy the law of God. Christ meets, fulfills, obeys the law of God to perfection. Christ in that condition of perfect righteousness goes as an unblemished lamb to the cross of Calvary as an unblemished lamb and having fulfilled everything that the law requires, having no guilt of his own to pay, he goes to the cross, stands in our place, God strikes him as a guilty sinner on behalf of everyone who would ever believe in him, and thus fulfills the penalty that the law requires, having given the perfect obedience that the law requires. And so Christ's obedience didn't advance his righteousness one bit, because he was already perfect. What he was doing was obeying the law of God on behalf of his people.

Look back at Galatians 4:5 with me again, just to reinforce the point. Galatians 4:5, and in a concentrated form, we read again in verse 4 that the Son was "born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." Those who were under the law were condemned by it. Christ was born under that law to achieve perfect obedience to it, to fulfill it in order to redeem those who did not fulfill it.

Now beloved, let me give you a theological term here that's not perfect, but it's more than sufficiently descriptive. When theologians talk about the death of Christ on the cross, they'll often talk about it in terms of his passive obedience. What they mean by that is that Christ yielded himself up to the cross so that he could bear the punishment of our sins in his own body, and he yielded to that. He wasn't entirely passive, he was active as he was dying and fulfilling Scripture even then, but it's descriptive enough. The death of Christ, the Lamb of God, as we talk about the obedience of Christ as we are here this morning, fulfilling all righteousness, this is sometimes called by the better theologians the active obedience of Christ, the active and the passive obedience of Christ. R. C. Sproul describes the active obedience this way and I quote, "The active obedience of Christ refers to his whole life of obeying the law of God whereby he qualifies to be the Savior. In our redemption, his righteousness is imputed to us, which righteousness he would not have had if he did not live this life of perfect obedience." God requires a perfect obedience, and Christ gave it. You need a perfect obedience to the law of God on your account if you're going to survive the judgment of God. What Christ did in his obedience to the law of God is credited to your account. It is applied to your benefit as a gift in salvation so that you stand, if you are a Christian, you stand before God credited with the perfect righteousness of Christ and God accepts that righteousness of Christ on your behalf when you repent of your sin and put your faith in him.

Think about it this way. Adam was born with a responsibility, or he was created, better stated, he was created with a responsibility to obey. He sinned and failed, and everybody that's a descendant of Adam enters into that condition of failure, judgment and falling short. We inherit his state of works, sin, and failure. Let that sink in. In biblical salvation, we are transferred out of the realm of Adam into the realm of Christ, and in that realm of Christ, there's perfect obedience to the law, there's satisfaction to the penalty that the law requires. Whereas in Adam, before our salvation, we had Adam works, sin, failure as our head, in Christ, we have obedience, forgiveness, eternal life as our head. Christ obeyed the law perfectly and receives the full reward of that. When he saves you, beloved, here's the thing, this is where all of the momentum is bringing us, when Christ saves you, when

a man is united by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, that man, that woman, that boy, that girl, inherits the full merit of everything that Jesus did because Jesus came to serve his people and to save them from their sins. And this is an integrated whole. His obedience is credited to your account. His death is credited to your account. We're used to thinking about it more in terms of his death, aren't we, that we get the benefit of the death of Christ applied to our account. Well, the full teaching of Scripture is that we also get the full benefit of his obedience to the law. And so we get credit for his death, we get credit for his obedience.

Look at Romans 5 with me. Romans 5:17 through 19. And in Romans 5:17, verses 12 through 21 is a very intricate argument that takes many messages to explain but we'll trust the Spirit of God to help us in a brief look at it. Romans 5:17, "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man," speaking of Adam, Adam's sin is imputed and affects all of humanity. Just one man, one trespass in real history, affected all of humanity, "much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men." The one act being looking at Jesus' life as a collective whole. Verse 19, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." Adam, the one man, disobeyed and everybody was ruined by it. Christ obeyed, died, and all who believe in him and are in him benefit to the full from it. John MacArthur says Adam disobeyed God and his disobedience was counted for condemnation to all who were in him. In the same way, Christ obeyed God and his obedience was counted for righteousness to all who are in him.

The imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness have a basis in the actual lived out actions of Adam and Christ and so you're either credited with the sin and disobedience of Adam with your own independent guilt added to it, and that's how you stand before God, in guilt and condemnation in Adam, or you're in Christ credited with the righteousness of Christ fully accounted to you and given to you as a gift. Take your pick. There is no third option. If you are not in Christ, you are in Adam, guilt, works, and condemnation. If you are in Christ, you have God crediting you with full obedience to everything his law requires and saying, "Enter into my kingdom." Which will it be for you, beloved?

Paul said in Philippians 3:9, and let's turn there, Philippians 3:9. As you're turning to Philippians, let me remind you of what 2 Corinthians 5:21 says. It says that he made him who knew no sin, who had perfectly obeyed, to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Our sin counted to Christ, condemned. His righteousness counted to us and blessed and rewarded. Double imputation. In Philippians 3:9, we'll start in verse 8, he says, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law," not a righteousness of my own obedience to the law, Paul says. "I don't want that because that is failure, that is

Adam, that is condemned. I haven't kept that law and so I don't claim a righteousness of my own. What I want is in Christ, that which comes through Christ," look at it there at the end of verse 9, "the righteousness from God that depends on faith." Not a righteousness of my own, a righteousness that belongs to Christ that is received by faith alone.

I realize this is heavy lifting, but think about it this way, we did not die for our sins, Christ did at the cross. We get the benefit of his death, even though we did not do it ourselves. In like manner, beloved, you and I have not kept the law of God but Christ did, and in Christ we get the full benefit of what's known as his act of obedience. This has enormous, far-reaching consequences and implications for understanding our security in Christ and if you will take the time to meditate on these things after you walk out of here, it could release you from a whole lot of confusion and guilt and bondage. When a man puts his faith in Christ, we say that he is justified and some of you that have grown up in certain circles and have been under ministries that like little, cute sayings, maybe have heard justification defined as justification means that it's just as if I'd never sinned. Have some of you heard that? Show of hands, you heard that? That's not a good statement of justification. I don't mean to startle you. Well, maybe I do. That's not a good statement of justification at all because, you see, justification is more than God saying you're not guilty. Adam in the Garden of Eden was not guilty, but he still fell and sinned and lost everything. No, in justification God does something far, far greater. He does not simply restore you to Adam's position of innocence and therefore you're not guilty. That's unstable. Adam fell from there. What God does for the believing Christian is he goes beyond saying you're not guilty, he says, "I accept you as fully righteous." Completely different. It's one thing to have no guilt, but you could have no guilt and say, therefore now I've got to carry the burden going forward. No, in justification, God does two things. He pardons all of your sin. He forgives all of your iniquities, all of your trespasses. He forgives it all and cleanses you from all of that but he goes further and he credits you with the full righteousness of Jesus Christ and he accepts you on that basis. He accepts you as righteous on the basis of obedience of Christ reckoned to your account. We've often heard it said, I think it comes from Horatius Bonar, "On a life I did not live, on a death I did not die. Another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity on." Christ's life, Christ's death, I stake my hope on that and nothing of me. You get the benefit of his death though you did not die. You get the benefit of his obedience in the same way.

So, beloved, wrapping Matthew 3 up in all of this, when Jesus told John the Baptist it was fitting to fulfill all righteousness, he was indicating that the act of baptism, which he did not need, was an essential part of the obedience which his people did need in order to be saved from their sins. All of his people needed the repentance and the baptism of repentance, and Christ stepped in and did it on their behalf. And so Christ not only died for you, beloved, he lived for you. He served you with his life. He served his people with his life in order to save them from their sins, in order to give that life as a ransom for many.

Some of you will know the name J. Gresham Machen who died back in 1937, as I recall. He was one of the greatest theologians of the earliest twentieth century, almost a hundred

years ago. It was a hundred years ago. He got sick unexpectedly and within a few days went from having a very active ministry and then realizing that he was on his deathbed and he was going to die within a matter of a very short time. He cabled his friend John Murray, who was a fellow professor of his at the newfound Westminster Seminary, and he said this in his dying hour. He said, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. There is no hope without it. The idea being that the law requires perfection and I don't have it to give. In the obedience of Christ, it's been accomplished on my behalf as a gift and therefore I am safe with God."

Now beloved, this all has practical implications for the way that you understand your salvation in Christ. Justification is not simply that Christ washed away your sins and justification is not that it's now up to you to keep the law. Justification tells us that Christ took our penalty for sin and he also kept the law perfectly on our behalf. Now think with me, stay with me, I'm almost done here. What that means is, if you've been a Christian 40 years, let's say, you are no more justified today than you were at the very initial moment of your salvation and if you can understand this, then you've really grasped a lot about the whole nature of salvation, at the initial moment of your salvation, you are as completely justified as you will ever be in heaven because at the moment of salvation, God justifies you not on the basis of what you have done or what you will do, he justifies and accepts you as righteous on the basis of what Christ did on your behalf. And so your good works do not contribute to your standing with God at all. Stated differently, if you are justified today, you will certainly be justified at the final judgment of God. There will be no loss in between, because your justification before God on the final day is the same justification on which he accepts you now. By his grace, you are utterly and completely saved from all of that and that gives you confidence as you think about the day of judgment. And I know that many of you, those of you that were raised in Nazarene environments, that you can lose your salvation, those of you that were raised Catholics, and everything about it is that you've got to earn the favor of God or you've got to keep the favor of God with your obedience. Beloved, this delivers you from all of that because what that implies, whether you've thought about it or not, whether it was ever said to you, is that the basis on which God saves you is a mixture of what Christ did and what you do. That's not the basis on which God saves you. You have nothing to do with it when it comes to justification. God accepts you completely on the merits of Christ and his active and his passive obedience, and that and that alone is the ground upon which God receives any sinner. And so your salvation is stable. Your salvation is secure. God said at the baptism of Christ, "This is my beloved Son, with him I am well pleased." When God saves you, when the Spirit draws you to Christ, he places you in Christ and everything that God says about Christ is true of you. God says, "I accept my Son. You're in my Son? I accept you too." That's what God requires, is that you would give yourself to Christ and rely upon him and his merits rather than your own for salvation.

And so all of this gives us confidence as we think about the day of judgment. In Christ, we will never be cast away. We couldn't be cast away. God would have to stop being God to cast away a true Christian. We will never be cast away because the grounds of our acceptance is stable and it never changes, that ground being the righteousness of Christ. That means, beloved, that you and I, we do not need to fear life. We do not need to fear

our own weakness in the sense of losing our salvation. We do not need to fear death. We do not need to fear the grave. We do not need to fear the throne of God itself because we stand complete in Christ in everything that he has done for us, and God is satisfied with that. As shown by the voice at the baptism, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," God is satisfied with that act of obedience. God is satisfied with the sacrifice, with the passive obedience, as shown by the fact that he raised Christ from the dead. Everything about Christ satisfies God completely and perfectly forever. So if you're in Christ, you're perfectly saved. You're perfectly secure. And I don't mean to shock you here with what I'm about to say, but the true Christian has the same status before God as Jesus Christ himself does because God credits everything of Christ to our benefit and there is no separation, there is no diminishment.

So you see, beloved, when you contemplate your blessed Lord, the work that Christ did for you was far more than three hours of suffering on the cross, it was three decades of obedience while he was here on earth and now he continues that work perpetually at the right hand of God interceding for you before the throne of God. And that standing with God is given to you at your salvation. We sing the hymn. I almost started to sing it. "My hope is built on nothing less than," what? "Jesus' blood and righteousness." His passive obedience, his active obedience. Everything about my hope before God is built on what God has done for me in Christ. His shed blood, his righteousness, that is what God requires and we will never be cast away if we are truly in him. We have a brother in heaven who loves us, who went before us 2,000 years ago, carried out what God requires, and now in time by his Spirit shares that blessing with everyone who repents and believes in him. If we're in Christ, we could never fall away. We could never be sent away any more than the Father could send away the Son in whom he is well pleased. That's the consequences of the things that we've seen here today and, dear friends, this salvation is freely offered to any sinner anywhere in the world at any time who would repent and believe in Christ and give himself over to this great Savior.

Will you be one of them? Are you in Christ? If so, you should leave here with full rejoicing, no matter what your circumstances are, knowing that you've been the object of a great eternal love that no money could purchase. If you're not in Christ, and I know that some of you are not, understand that what has been shared with you from the word of God today is the difference between an eternity of suffering in hell and an eternity of love and bliss and forgiveness in heaven. There is no third option. Will you have Adam? Will you have your own sin? Will you have your own disobedience? Will you have the judgment that comes with that and choose that? Because there is nothing in Christ, there is nothing in God, there is nothing in the offer of the gospel that hinders you from coming. God will have you. Christ will have you. He says, "Come to me. Take of the water and drink of the water of salvation without cost." There's nothing in Christ that pushes you away. If you're not found in Christ at the end, it will only be because of your own sinful defiance of an offer made to you in love and good faith for your eternal blessing. Oh dear friend, why would you turn away from that?

Let's pray together.

Father, these are wonderful truths, weighty matters, hard for us to think through all of it and get our minds around it. So, having said all that we can say, we just ask for the help of your Spirit to encourage your true children to call those outside of Christ into your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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