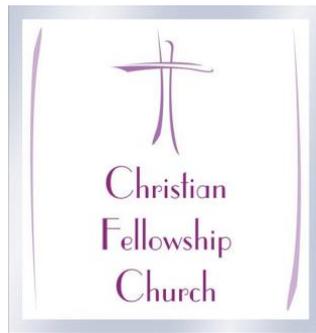


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Ministry of the Word
Sunday 16th February 2020
by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

Subject: Part 8 – The Commission of the King

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. ¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Matthew has presented Jesus as King so far in his Gospel. Jesus is King by prophecy, paternity, genealogy and by the identification of the Magi. Jesus is the promised King, the Anointed One, Messiah, Kings of Kings and Lord of lords! When a king or queen is being coronated, the ceremony of crowning a sovereign is done with a great deal of pomp and ceremony. To say the least, it's a huge affair. When we peer down at our text this morning, we see a totally different affair. It is a public ceremony, attended by mostly ordinary people and Jesus is presented as the 'One to Come', so the King is identified and all three persons of the Godhead unit to initiate the ministry of the Messiah. It's a very important passage as we study the King of Kings because it deals with a crucial problem: What kind of a kingdom could the righteous King Jesus possibly have when it is a Kingdom populated by sinners? How can the subjects of the Kingdom be made as righteous as He is?

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Just think about it for a moment, the co-creator of the universe becomes man, and lives not in the spotlight but in obscurity for 30 years. The Bible gives us very little details of Jesus' life during his young years. We are given a few glimpses. Luke tells us the story of how, when He was twelve, He was found by His mother and Joseph in the temple - talking to the teachers and scholars who were astonished at His understanding. And even then, His own testimony was that He was 'about His Father's business' (Luke 2:49).

We know from the gospels that during that time he was a carpenter, lived in Nazareth, was part of a family, he would of had friends, performed simple duties in the home, day to day stuff we all face in life. While we may not know the details of those years, we can be sure Luke's words characterised how Jesus occupied them. He was always about His Father's business. He lived a life of constant and complete righteousness. He said, *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"* (John 9:5). He testified, *"The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him"* (8:29).

Never once, in all those years, did Jesus ever sin. Not once! He never violated His Father's wishes. He never transgressed His Father's commandments. Throughout all those years that He walked and worked upon this earth, it was always His *"food"* to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). And that wasn't just His own testimony that He lived a sinless life. That is the testimony we find of Him throughout the Scriptures. The prophet Isaiah spoke of Him some seven centuries before He was born into the world, and said that He *"had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth"* (Isaiah 53:9). The writer of Hebrews, looking back upon His earthly life, says that He was *"in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15); and says that He is a High Priest *"who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"* (7:26). The apostle Peter said that He was *"as a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:19). The apostle John plainly said that *"in Him there is no sin"* (1 John 3:5).

All that time He knew He was God incarnate, He knew who His Father is, He knew there was a lost world that He would need to save, as He was and is the only Hope. For all that time, he waited for the Father's timing, patiently, in complete unquestioning submission to the Father, until the hour was right, and when that hour struck, He came forth, and in verse 13 it says, He

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came to the Jordan. Stepping out of the obscurity of Nazareth, to make His first official public appearance, initiating His ministry. The distance from the Galilee to the lower Jordan was about 60 miles. *You mean Jesus walked 60 miles just to be baptized? YES! How far are you willing to go to experience the power of God and the presence of God? To hear the voice God and confirm the favour of God in your life and in your ministry?*

Jesus came to where John was ministering, humbly appearing. For those gathered that day it was one that they would never forget. They would be witnesses of the working of the Trinity. Remember the Jews were Monotheists even though Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 says 'Let us' inferring the Trinity, there was the theophany of Jesus multiple times in the Old Testament, even Daniel chapter 7 speaks of the Trinity. The Trinity was concealed in that the Holy Spirit as a person was not visible though present. The Jews saw the Power of God in anointing different ones for service only. It is not until this moment that the Person of the Holy Spirit is revealed. They would hear who Jesus is from Heaven itself, hearing the God of Glory, the one true living God, The God of their ancestors, and the creator of all things appointing Him, declaring him Heir and Messiah, and seeing an emblem of the Holy Spirit fill Him with the power of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing to compare to this amazing scene. And in plain view of all. Jaw dropping stuff! Simply profound.

Verses 13&14

In verse 13, we have a lovely picture of the Shepherd coming as it were, to the place where the sheep are to be found. In the Greek construction here, for those of you who love the Greek, when you see infinitive with "to," you know that this is a purpose that's being denoted. Jesus didn't come to see the sheep on this occasion, but He went with the express intention and purpose to be baptized by John which was going to be the commencement of His ministry. For John, the idea of him baptising Jesus was unthinkable. He not only knew Jesus' human identity but His divine identity. At first glance, this passage has really been a problem for a lot of people, until you really examine the text carefully. Remember John's baptism was for confession of sin and repentance (3:2, 6, 11), of which John himself needed; but Jesus had no sins to confess or be forgiven of. John's baptism was for those who turned from their sin and thereby became fit for the arrival of the great King.

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In verse 14 John shows his own turmoil with Jesus' request, as he tried to prevent Him! The Greek verb suggests a continued effort by John—*"he kept trying to prevent Him."* According to Greek scholars they say that the pronouns in John's statement are all emphatic, giving evidence of his bewilderment. *"I have need to be baptized by You, and why do You come to me?"*

From the very beginning, it is clear that this is the sinless, undefiled, Holy Messiah of God. John started out, the first time Jesus ever showed His face publicly to minister, with a declaration of the absolute sinlessness of Jesus Christ, setting Him above even the greatest prophet who ever lived. Jesus is not just another prophet. He's in a totally unique category. Prophets are sinners. Jesus is sinless. (Hebrews 4:15)

John was resisting baptizing Jesus for exactly the opposite reason that he resisted baptizing the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were in great need of repentance but were unwilling to ask for it and gave no evidence of having it. John therefore refused to baptise them, calling them a *"brood of vipers"* (3:7). Jesus, by contrast, came for baptism, yet didn't need to repent. John refused to baptise the Pharisees and Sadducees because they were totally unworthy of it. Now he was almost equally reluctant to baptise Jesus, because He was too worthy for it. John reasoned in his mind and heart, that his baptism for repentance from sin was totally inappropriate for Jesus. John acknowledged Jesus as the Christ,

"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

So Why should the One, the sinless King Himself, who takes away sin submit Himself to a baptism ceremony that represents confession and repentance of sin?

Some people resolved this problem in different ways - For example: In the early centuries, those who were strongly influenced by Gnostic philosophy believed that until His baptism, Jesus was just an ordinary man, sinful like every other man. At His baptism he was endowed with deity by the divine logos (Word), the *"Christ Spirit."* His baptism was therefore necessary to purify Him and make Him suitable to receive the divine endowment. Like the rest of the Gnostic views, that idea does not square with Scripture. Jesus was born the Son of God (Luke

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1:32, 35) and was called *'Immanuel'* which translated means *'God with us'* even before His birth (Matthew 1:23). Others believed that it was because his mother and family told Him to go.

But these answers are not Scriptural at all, in fact if you just carry on the following verse, **verse 15** begins to explain the “why” question.

Some interpreters suggest that He intended His baptism to be a sort of initiatory rite for His high priesthood, reflecting the age and the ceremony which prepared the Old Testament priests for their ministry. Others suggest that Jesus wanted to identify Himself with the Gentiles, who were initiated into Judaism as proselytes by the act of baptism. Still others take Jesus' baptism to be His recognition and endorsement of John's authority, basically Jesus accrediting John as a true prophet of God and the genuine forerunner of His own ministry. A fourth view is that the Lord intended to be baptised vicariously for the sins of mankind, making His baptism, along with His atoning death on the cross, a part of His sin-bearing, redemptive work. None of these fits the context of the present passage. Jesus Himself explains to John His reason for wanting to be baptized. Jesus said,

“Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.”

These are words of royal dignity and humility. But how are we to think about it? What are God's righteous claims? Do they include the revelation of His identity; His holiness and His love; and man's sinful condition?

“Permit it at this time” was an idiom meaning that the act of His baptism, though not seemingly appropriate, was indeed appropriate for this special time. Jesus understood John's reluctance and knew that it came from deep spiritual commitment and sincerity. He gave divine instruction to John to do what he would never have been willing to do on his own accord. He assured the prophet that in this way it was fitting, and went on to explain to John that His baptism was important for both of their ministries, for *'us'* to fulfil all righteousness. For God's plan to be perfectly fulfilled, it was necessary for Jesus to be baptised and to be baptised specifically by John.

“For Jesus the immersion in water (like the waters of God's judgment) and emergence from that water (a picture of the resurrection) foreshadow his own death, burial and resurrection. The sacrificial death of Jesus—his burial—his resurrection—and “satisfy the demands of

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divine justice and provide a righteous basis by which sinners could be justified" (MacDonald; Believer's Bible Commentary; p.1212).

Jesus made only two other references to personal baptism, and each related to His death. Not long before His final trip to Jerusalem He told His disciples,

"I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!"
(Luke 12:50).

On the other occasion He was responding to the request by James and John that they be given the top positions in His heavenly kingdom.

"You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?" (Mark 10:38).

Jesus submitted to baptism also as an example of obedience to His followers. Jesus is our perfect example in everything. In His baptism, He acknowledged that John's standard of righteousness was valid and in action affirmed it as the will of God to which men are to be subject for that time only. Baptism does not take away sin, never could and to suggest that it can is unscriptural.

Jesus' baptism also represented the willing identification of the sinless Son of God with the sinful people He came to save. Jesus came into the world to identify with men; and to identify with men is to identify with sin. He could not purchase righteousness for mankind if He did not identify with mankind's sin. Hundreds of years before Christ's coming, Isaiah had declared that the Messiah

"was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

That was the first act of His ministry, the first step in the redemptive plan that He came to fulfil. He who had no sin took His place among those who had no righteousness. He who was without sin submitted to a baptism for sinners. In this act the Saviour of the world took His place among the sinners of the world. The sinless Friend of sinners was sent by the Father

"in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3);

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There was no other way to fulfil all righteousness.

Think for a moment. Jesus identifies with lost humanity. Jesus identifies with every human being. The Bible says (2 Corinthians 5:21); *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”.*

The Lord God poured all human sin and the punishment for that sin unto Jesus; and poured all of the righteousness of Jesus into the believing sinner, who becomes the believing saint! Do you have family? They share your name. They share your history. We share a common origin. Jesus is willing to bear your sin and share His name and righteousness with you.

Jesus will identify with humanity. And Jesus will submit to His Father.

“Jesus was declaring His submission to His Father’s plan, and His expectation of His Father’s power” (Jon Courson p.55).

Jesus’ supreme identification with sinners was His taking their sin upon Himself, which He did at Calvary. Though John, having been given such a brief explanation, could not possibly have comprehended the full meaning of Jesus’ baptism, he accepted His Lord’s word and obeyed. Then he permitted Him.

Incredibly, Jesus saw fit that John the Baptist, a man born under the curse of sin - was included in this work of the fulfilment of all righteousness. And so are you and I, and all who believe upon Him. What Jesus does in this passage, you see, is to step into our sin problem with us, become numbered with and united to "us" in such a way as to make our problem His own, and to then do what is fitting for "us" to fulfil all righteousness.

As we come to **verse 16** we read that Jesus was totally submerged as He came up from the water. You don’t come up from a few sprinkles and shakes of a few drops of water!

A true believer’s baptism represents the believer’s identification with Christ’s death and resurrection (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). In both cases the significance of the act is lost if it does not involve immersion. Sprinkling or pouring does not fit either the symbolism of cleansing or of dying and being raised. The Christian church knew only total immersion until the Middle Ages, when the practice of sprinkling or pouring was introduced by the Roman Catholic church which itself had previously always baptised by immersion. The great Catholic

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theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) said, *“In immersion the setting forth of the burial of Christ is more plainly expressed, in which this manner of baptizing is more commendable.”*

The Catholic church did not recognize other modes until the Council of Ravenna,(pronounced Ravella) held in France in 1311. It was from the Catholic church that Lutheran and Reformed churches inherited the form of sprinkling or pouring. The Church of England did not begin the practice of sprinkling until 1645. The Eastern Orthodox church has never permitted any mode but immersion. It says in John chapter 3, verse 23, *“And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.”* Now, there's no reason to be concerned about where there's the most water if you're sprinkling. *“There was much water there”* - water that could be used for immersion. And in the 8th chapter of Acts, and verse 38, *“And Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. Both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”*

When Jesus came out of the water, behold, the heavens were opened. This doesn't mean that it rained non-stop! but something happened and they saw the spirit of God come down. Now you might be tempted to ask me later 'what actually happened, what did that look like' Am I going to have to tell you, I don't know but I'm sure if you saw it, you'd see some amazing things. I know this because of what others in Scripture described when they saw the heavens opened. For example: When Ezekiel saw the heavens opened and had the vision of God, he saw such things as the four living creatures, the chariot, and the wheels (Ezekiel 1:1-19). Just before he died, Stephen saw *“the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”* (Acts 7:56), and John the apostle saw amazing things in the book Revelation. Paul's experience of being *“caught up to the third heaven”* was so wonderful and amazing as to be *“inexpressible”* (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

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As one commentator suggests, *“Just as the veil of the Temple was rent in twain to symbolize the perfect access of all men to God, so here the heavens are rent as under to show how near God is to Jesus, and Jesus is to God.”*

When the heavens opened before John the Baptist, he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, just as the Lord had promised (John 1:33). The confirming sign was that of a dove, the only instance in which the Holy Spirit was ever so represented. It was something quite visible and striking. I was once told by a man who raises doves that when they fly, they make quite a bit of commotion about it. They flap loudly and violently; and they send feathers all over the place. The Spirit's descent in the form of a dove would have been something that would have been plainly visible to everyone.

But why did the Holy Spirit descend upon Him "like a dove"? In the Scriptures, it was a dove that demonstrated that the waters of the great flood had receded and that God's wrath for sin upon the world was over (Genesis 8:11). Doves were also symbols in the Scripture for innocence and harmlessness. Jesus once sent His disciples out to be His witnesses in a very hostile world; and He commanded them to be as "harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). In the Song of Solomon, doves are used as a metaphor for something beautiful and precious and lovely; as when Solomon spoke of his bride and said, *"My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her"* (Song of Solomon 6:9). Doves were also referred to in the Scripture as offerings - the most humble offering someone could make. If someone had a child, and they were too poor to offer the usual offering for their newborn child, they were commanded to offer "two turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Leviticus 12:8). You may remember that Mary and Joseph were so poor that that's what they had to offer for Jesus (Luke 2:24). To the Jewish mind of that day the dove was associated with sacrifice. Bullocks were sacrificed by the rich and lambs by the middle class, but most of the people were poor and could only afford a dove.

Could it be that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove intentionally - in order to clearly mark Jesus out as approved by God as our sin bearer? I believe He did mark Jesus out for us as "dove-like" - innocent and harmless in that He had no sin; beautiful and

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precious in the sight of His Father; a sign that peace has come and that God's wrath for sin was satisfied; and the humblest and most available of all the sacrifices for sin that could be made.

Why did the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus? When He became a man, Jesus did not lose His divinity. He was still fully God in every way. In His deity He needed nothing. But in His humanity He was here being anointed for service and granted strength for ministry. The Spirit anointed Him for His kingly service, as Isaiah had predicted:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners” (Isaiah 61:1).

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth. That's His human identification. So His humanity was anointed. He was inaugurated into His kingly office.

Verse 17

All the Trinity participated in Jesus' baptism. The Son had confirmed His own kingship by saying, “It is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (v. 15). The Spirit had confirmed His right of messiahship by resting on Him (v. 16). The final aspect of Jesus' coronation, or commissioning, was the Father's confirming word. For a sacrifice to be acceptable to God it must be pure, spotless, without blemish (Ex. 12:5; Lev. 1:3; Deut. 17:1; etc.). Of this One who willingly identified Himself with sinners by His baptism and who was marked by the Holy Spirit as the dove of sacrifice, the Father now said, in verse 17 “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

No Old Testament sacrifice, no matter how carefully selected, had ever been truly pleasing to God. Not only that, but the blood of those animals was at best only symbolic,

“for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4; 9:12).

But the sacrifice Jesus would make on the cross would be

“with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ”

(1 Peter 1:19).

Thus God could say He was well-pleased with the perfection of Jesus Christ (cross reference Matthew 17:5; John 12:28, where God repeats this divine commendation).

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In the New Testament the Father speaks to the Son from Heaven three times (here; Matthew 17:5 and John 12:28). The voice quotes Scripture; “this is My beloved Son”(Psalm 2:7); “in whom I am well pleased” (Isaiah 42:1).

‘This is my priceless Son, I am deeply pleased with Him.’ The Father approves of His Son, in what Jesus says and what Jesus does! Jesus is God’s Son. Psalm 2:7; **“The Lord hath said unto Me, ‘Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee’**”. Acts 13:22 informs us that this ‘begetting’ refers to His resurrection from the dead, and not his birth in Bethlehem. **“This statement ties in perfectly with the Lord’s baptismal experience of death, burial, and resurrection”** (Wiersbe p. 17). The Father’s approval meant Jesus was ready to begin His earthly ministry.

Beloved (agapetos) suggests a deep, rich, and profound relationship. It is used here of the Father’s great love for His Son, but it is also used elsewhere of His love for believers (Romans 1:7). As believers, we too are a delight to the Father, because we are now in the Son. Because the Father finds no imperfection in His Son, He now by His grace finds no imperfection in those who trust in Him (cross reference Romans 3:26; 5:17, 21; Galatians 2:20; 3:27; Ephesians 1:3-6; etc.). It is also used for what believers’ love towards each other should be (1 Corinthians 4:14). Jesus is the Father’s beloved above all those He loves, the beloved apart from whom no other could ever be beloved (Ephesians 1:6). Only in His Son could the Father ever be fully well-pleased. The fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is central to the gospel. In no passage is that made more clear than in Hebrews 1:1-8.

Jesus Christ is the fullest expression of God. He is superior to and exalted above everything and everyone else. He is the beginning of all things, Creator; the middle of all things, Sustainer and Purifier; and the end of all things, Heir (see also Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16). The Son is the manifestation of God, the radiance of God’s personal glory, the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). In Him all deity dwells (Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9). Because of His deity, He is superior to the angels who worship Him.

Even God’s title as Father is a reference to His essential relationship to Jesus Christ. God is presented in the New Testament more as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:27; John 5:17-18; 10:29-33) than as the Father of believers (Matthew 6:9). When Jesus called

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God "Father," He was not underlining primarily submission or even generation but sameness of essence, that is deity. John 5:23 sums it up by demanding *"that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."* No one can worship God unless he worships Him as the God who is one with King Jesus *"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."* He is chosen to be king, yet He was going to die as a sin offering. And so He was commissioned. By baptism, He identifies with sinners and pictures His death. By being anointed with the Spirit, He is empowered to minister a ministry that ultimately will make Him a sacrifice. And by the Father's word, He is said to be the worthy sacrifice. What an introduction. What a beginning. What a ministry was His.

In the baptism of Jesus we see a living illustration of our own baptism. We are baptized by Jesus into the Holy Spirit and we become members of Christ's forever family and members of His Church. We are baptized in water and we identify with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection. Have you been baptized by the Spirit into the body? Have you been baptized by the water in obedience to Christ? Are you ready to fulfil all righteousness? We have no other redeemer than Jesus! Indeed, there is no other like Him! No other is so righteous as to bear our sins on our behalf. No other is so gracious as to stoop down to the level of entering into our fallenness with us. No other is so clearly graced with divine approval! He truly has become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He truly is a righteous King over a righteous kingdom - with us as His redeemed subjects, if we believe on Him! How foolish would we be to reject the only righteous One in order to try to earn God's favour by our own pathetic efforts at righteousness! How foolish we would be to reject Him and stand before God alone in our sin! How foolish we would be to reject Him whom heaven itself so clearly approved! May no one in this room today insult the grace of God by even trying to do such a thing! Instead, may we embrace this One who so lovingly and graciously embraced us - *"for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."*

Amen