

Matt. 3:13-17 - The Inauguration of Jesus Christ

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 11 January 2009 15:44

1.

Introduction

1.

On January 20th our country will witness the inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States, and some of you will listen to his inauguration address. What will he say? Likely he will thank those who have helped him, and encourage us to pursue what he believes is a good plan for the future of America and for the world. At the center of the inauguration ceremony he will take the oath of office, in which he will commit himself publicly to serve as our president. For our new president and our nation it will be a high day, full of pomp and circumstance. And if President Obama says the words "So help me God" after his oath, we must pray that God will help him do what is right, and restrain him from doing what is evil.

2.

Our passage today presents the inauguration of Jesus Christ. Its form is so different from our nation's presidential inaugurations that you could easily miss its purpose. This is the inauguration of Jesus Christ. Here Christ begins His public ministry as God's Son and our Redeemer. Though He humbly spent the first 30 years of His life in obscurity, out of the public eye, now "the Sun of Righteousness shall rise" (**Mal. 4:2**), and "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.

" (**Is. 40:5**)

3.

Outline. What happened at the inauguration of Jesus Christ? There is both a great humiliation, and a great exaltation. In vv. 13-15, Jesus submits to God the Father. In vv. 16-17, God the Father approves of His Son

1.

Jesus Submits to God the Father vv. 13-15

2.

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God the Father Approves of His Son vv. 16-17

3.

Body

1.

Jesus Submits to God the Father vv. 13-15

1.

First, Jesus submits to God the Father. In vv. 13-15 we read,

1.

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

2.

14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

3.

15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

4.

Jesus' purpose to be baptized by John v. 13

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1.

Notice here Jesus' purpose to be baptized by John, John's objection to baptizing Jesus, and Jesus' reason for being baptized

2.

Jesus' purpose to be baptized by John is clear. He travels from Galilee to the Jordan, no short distance, specifically to come to John the Baptist, and to be baptized by him. Jesus' purpose is deeper than merely to undergo the outward washing of baptism, however, and His true intent can only be recognized in the significance of John's baptism.

3.

John's baptism was an ordinance which God had appointed for all His true followers in Israel to undergo at that time. God sent John the Baptist to call His people to repentance, and to baptize them to symbolize God's washing their sins away. Jesus submitted Himself to God's ordinance. In this you see Jesus' holy submission to God the Father. Here we see the beginning of Christ's public obedience as a man to all the law of God.

4.

But there is more. John's baptism was a baptism for sinners, and Jesus was not a sinner. Why did He need to be baptized? This should amaze you. He "who knew no sin" (**2 Cor. 5:21**) submitted to a baptism of repentance. He came "to be baptized by a sinner, as a sinner, and among sinners."

[1](#)

Here Christ not only submits to God, but places Himself in the most humiliating position. By becoming a man, Jesus began His state of humiliation. He has already "emptied himself, and *made himself of no reputation*

. He is not only

found in fashion as a man

, but is made in the likeness of sinful flesh," and therefore allows Himself to be baptized "as if He needed to be washed, though perfectly pure; and thus he was

made sin for us

, though he

knew no sin

."

[2](#)

5.

John's objection to baptizing Jesus

1.

John the Baptist immediately objects! He tries to put a stop to this madness. "Jesus, how can you ask me to baptize you as if you are a sinner, when I am the sinner?! You are greater than me; I'm not even worthy to untie your sandals, and you want me to call you a wicked sinner? May it never be!"

2.

Jesus' reason for being baptized

1.

But Jesus says, "Let it be so now." "John, there's a reason why I must be treated as a sinner. I must be treated as a sinner because you are a sinner. I am taking the form of a servant in order to be the servant of all."

2.

Jesus says "thus it is fitting." John thought it was not fitting for John to humiliate Jesus Christ, because Jesus was the greater of the two. But Jesus calls John to forget the comparison between the two men for the moment, and remember why Christ came into the world. "

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

" (

1 Tim. 1:15

) And to save them, He must be made like them "in every way," be identified with them, and represent them, even bearing the reproach of their sins.

3.

It was also fitting that John should baptize Jesus because it was an appropriate means to transfer God's work of saving His people from the ministry of John to the ministry of Jesus. John's ministry was public, widely known, and even highly respected at this point. But Jesus' ministry had not yet been revealed to the general public. Though for a little while this baptism

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furthered Jesus' humiliation and John's exaltation, in God's time it would bring about John's own declaration that "He must increase, but I must decrease." (**John 3:30**) "It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

" (

Heb. 2:10

)

4.

It was fitting, Jesus says, "to fulfill all righteousness." Christ was "born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons.

" (

Gal. 4:4

) It was necessary for Christ to obey all of God's requirements, all of God's law, throughout His whole life, in order for Him to serve as our representative before God the Father, in order for God's justice to be satisfied in the Covenant of Works. In the Covenant of Works, the first Adam disobeyed God, but Christ the last Adam obeyed God even unto death on a cross.

5.

Now understanding that in this way the Seed of the Woman's heel would be bruised as He crushed the Serpent's head, that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and then enter into His glory (Luke 24:26), John the Baptist consented and baptized Jesus.

6.

God the Father Approves of His Son vv. 16-17

1.

In my place condemned He stood—even here in Christ's humiliation is the glory of God's grace. But as God says to you much more He brought about for your Savior—"Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. "

(

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1 Pet. 5:5-7

) "

20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

" (

1 Pet. 2:20-22

) "

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

" (

1 Pet. 4:19

) Humbly Jesus entrusted Himself to His Father in heaven, and for that reason God highly exalted Him.

2.

Text. We read how God gave His highest approval of Jesus in **vv. 16-17**, where God the Father approves of His Son

.

1.

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;

2.

17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

3.

"Went up"

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1.

First, Jesus "went up from the water." "Others that were baptized staid to *confess their sins* (v. 6); but Christ, having no sins to confess, went *up* immediately [from] *the water*."

[3](#)

2.

Notice that this passage does not teach baptism by immersion. The Greek does not say Jesus went up "out" of the water, but rather that He went up "from" the water. As such the passage does not teach that He came up from under the surface of the water, but that He came up from the bank of the river. In v. 13 He had come to the edge of the Jordan to be baptized (indicated by the preposition *epi*), and now having been baptized he comes from the edge of the Jordan (indicated by the preposition *apo*).

Even the word "went up" (*anabaino*) indicates travel by foot with a horizontal component, rather than rising vertically, which is more commonly indicated by *anistemi*, "to rise," *epairo*, "to raise" in one's arms, or *anatello*, "to move upward" like the motion of the sun or stars.

3.

"The heavens were opened to Him"

1.

Notice how good God's timing is—it was when those present still had their eyes on Him that "the heavens were opened to Him." The heavens were opened to make plain to all men

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that Jesus had full communion and open communication with God the Father and God the Spirit. He can talk to the Father any time He wants, with no fear of judgment. Even the boundaries of creation bow to the truth Jesus proclaimed, that "

I and the Father are one.

" (

John 10:30

)

2.

This great mystery of the Trinity, that there is one God in three Persons, and that those Persons are eternally united to one another in love, is not only worthy of all creation's worship. It is also the source of your salvation

. The heavens were opened "

to him

," to Christ, but they were not opened for only Christ to see. John the Baptist also saw heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus (

John 1:32

), and so probably the crowds around saw these events as well. These things happened for

your

sake, so you would know that through Jesus Christ's perfect communion with God the Father a way has been opened for you to be reconciled to God.

3.

"Your sin has separated you from God" (**Is. 59:2**), but through Christ the heavens are now open to you also, so that like the angels on Jacob's ladder you now enter into the Holy of Holies and have access to the throne of grace.

4.

"The Spirit of God descending like a dove"

1.

To further demonstrate the infinite and exhaustive unity between Jesus Christ and the other Persons of the Godhead, God the Spirit and God the Father both indicate their full approval of God the Son.

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2.

Jesus and John, and the others present, "saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him. " This should call us to remember the Spirit hovering—like a bird—over the waters at creation. At His inauguration Christ began the work of bringing the new creation to life.

3.

Christ who in His divine nature is of one substance with the Holy Spirit, received this endowment of the Spirit in His human nature to set Him apart as a prophet, for all the prophets spoke by the Holy Spirit. He also received the Spirit as the Head of the church, so that the Spirit whom He received, like the oil poured out on Aaron's head ran down to the edges of his robe, Christ would later pour out on the church at Pentecost. He "received gifts for men" (**Ps. 68:18**) now in order to give " gifts to men " (**Eph. 4:8**) later.

4.

Is. 11:2 had prophesied "the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him" to give Him wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. At the beginning of His ministry Jesus quoted **Is. 61:1** , which said the Messiah would say " The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. "

5.

And now the Spirit descended in the form of a dove (cf. Luke 3:22). The Spirit did not appear in the form of a man, for the human form God has reserved for Christ. But a dove is marked by gentleness and innocence. We who are in Christ are to be "innocent as doves" (**Matt. 10:16**), and the Holy Spirit is Holy. God demonstrated Christ's holiness and innocence by the pure relational harmony, the open communion between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, between the second and the third Persons of the Trinity. " God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. "

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1 John 1:5

) "
Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

" (

James 1:17

) Just as a dove brought news to Noah that the flood was receding from the face of the earth, so in Jesus Christ there is peace on earth for men on whom God's favor rests. "

11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

" (

Jer. 29:11-14

) Jesus Christ is the end of the Exile, the end of your life of sin, for you who have faith in Him.

6.

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

1.

Lastly, God the Father spoke in the hearing of all present that "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. "

2.

God did not leave the events of Jesus' inauguration without the authoritative and clear explanation of His word. Like at Mount Sinai, they saw no form of God the Father, but rather heard His voice. (**Deut. 4:12**) "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. " (**John 1:17**) This gospel is the best news that has come from heaven to earth, for "it speaks plainly and fully God's favour to Christ, and us in him."

[4](#)

3.

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God's words read this way in the Greek: "My son, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

" You can recognize in these words

God's relation

,
God's affection

, and

God's satisfaction

in Jesus Christ.

4.

God's Relation: Son

-

God declares the relation Jesus has to Him. Jesus is God's Son.

-

He is God's Son from all eternity in His divine nature.

-

He is God's Son in time because He was conceived by the Holy Ghost.

-

And He is God's Son in God's covenant and redemption because He represents us before God as our Redeemer.

-

God's Affection: Beloved

-

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God also declares His affection for His Son. Jesus is God's "beloved." There is no one else whom God loves more than Jesus Christ. And for that reason, when God unites you to His beloved Son,"

then you can be sure He will give you " redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

" (

Col. 1:13-14

)
"

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

" (

Rom. 8:32

) "

Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God!

" (

1 John 3:1

)

-

God's Satisfaction: Well-pleased

-

You can be certain not only that God loves His Son, but also that God is "well-pleased" in His Son, Jesus Christ. God declares not only His affection for

, but also His

satisfaction in

, Jesus Christ. Even in the OT God declared the pleasure He takes in God the Son,

-

Isaiah 42:1

-

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit

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upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

-

Notice that God is not only pleased with, but is pleased in His Son. Not just with Christ on the outside, but with Christ on the inside, in His character, and in all those who are found in Him. In that word "in" you should see God's gracious readiness to unite you to His Son in order to also be pleased with you who are found in Christ.

-

And in fact God is pleased not only with Christ, but with you, if you have called out to Him to save you through Christ's death and resurrection. If you have done that, **Eph. 1:6** says God has now made you "accepted in the Beloved."

He delights in you, because of Christ your Savior. Through Christ who alone is righteous on your behalf, God delights not only your person, but your works, and your worship. Through Christ we now "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

" (

1 Peter 2:5

) Outside Christ "

God is a consuming fire

"

(

Heb. 12:29

), but in Christ He is your reconciled Father.

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1.

Conclusion

1.

At Christ's inauguration, Jesus submitted to God the Father, and God the Father approved of His Son

2.

Because Jesus submitted to God the Father, undergoing a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, in order to represent you before God the Father, you too must repent of your sins! If you have not been baptized, you should follow Him in being baptized! You should follow Him in being willing to humbly suffer in this life on His behalf as you await the day when you will follow Him to glory.

3.

Because God the Father approved of His Son, you should also rejoice in His great mercy and grace to you, at His love which He gives to you through Jesus Christ, in calling you now a son of God. If you have any doubt that Jesus is the Son of God, remember why Jesus said, "The Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.

" (

John 5:37

) He said that to remind you, and all people, that God has miraculously, supernaturally, with all authority and power, with all the clarity, necessity, and sufficiency of His own word, declared Jesus Christ to be His Son. There is no good reason to doubt Christ's divinity or Messiahship. There is no good reason to doubt that He is the Savior, the " way, the truth, and the life, " without whom no one can come to the Father.

4.

At Christ's inauguration He was revealed as your Savior, and your God. "Listen to Him" (

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Matt. 17:5

), love Him, worship and serve Him with all that you are. No earthly king is as gracious, as just, as righteous, as infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, as Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Lift up your hearts to give glory to His name.

[1](#) Matthew Henry, 28.

[2](#) Matthew Henry, 28.

[3](#) Matthew Henry, 29.

[4](#) Matthew Henry, 30.