



Matthew 3:13–15

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

In the lead-up to today’s passage we’ve seen John the Baptist fearlessly prophesying about

the coming of Jesus. Yesterday's passage left us with a picture of one more powerful than John, coming to baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus will pour God's spirit out on those who turn to him in repentance and faith. But on those who refuse his call, Jesus will bring a baptism of fire and judgement. And John's picture of Jesus sits consistently with Jewish expectations about the coming of God's king. God's Messiah, his anointed one, would be a warrior king like David who would come and take back Jerusalem from the Romans and reign on David's throne forever.

And so today's passage represents an extraordinary anti-climax. Even John is caught wrong footed and comes across as a little shell-shocked. Matthew is typically circumspect, but there is much behind his words. He begins very matter-of-factly with:

‘Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.’

This is the first picture of Jesus as an adult. But contrary to both John’s and Jewish messianic expectations he’s not arriving triumphantly in Jerusalem to retake the throne of David and the temple of Solomon. Nor is he coming out of the desert as a military conqueror like the ancient warrior David. He’s not even the arriving in the form of a mighty prophet like John. Instead, Jesus has quietly travelled about 110 kilometres from the unremarkable farming region of Galilee, to be baptized by John; just one of the many thousands travelling out to be baptised by him.

And John can’t believe it, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Yesterday we saw how humble John is, and here

humble John meets humble Jesus. Yesterday John said that he wasn't even worthy to bend down and untie the dusty sandals on Jesus' feet, the job of the lowliest servant in the ancient world, and yet here Jesus is asking John to baptize him. And because it's so unthinkable to John, he tries to put Jesus off.

And thinking about it, it is truly extraordinary isn't it? Here we are in the first public moment of Jesus' ministry and what is Jesus doing? He's humbling himself. Jesus is deserving of the highest honours and yet his first act is to humble himself. Jesus comes to preach and in his first act, he preaches humility. John tries to deter him, but Jesus insists with the words, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness' and so John gives in.

But what is going on here? What is Jesus doing being baptised by John? The bible is really clear that Jesus was the only human to never sin. For example, 2 Cor 5:21 says that Jesus 'knew no sin' and Hebrews 4:15 says that he was without sin. So why is Jesus asking to receive John's baptism of repentance? This will become clearer tomorrow but for today, Jesus give us this reason, from verse 15: 'it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness' which comes across as a little enigmatic but here's what I think it means. Righteousness is one of those Christian words that means a range of things. A simple way of thinking about it is that to be righteous is to be 'right with God.' But in the sense that it is used in our passage today it's bigger than that. Fulfilling all righteous sounds like a lot of what Matthew has been doing so far, showing us how Jesus has come to fulfil God's plans and promises from

the Old Testament. So 'fulfilling all righteousness' has to do here with showing us that Jesus' baptism by John is integral to the work he's come to do on earth. It's somehow right at the centre of what Jesus has come to do on earth.

So here's what I think is going on. Jesus could have come and stood alongside John, calling all people everywhere to repentance and faith. But instead he's deliberately chosen to stand alongside sinners. He's down there with them, making himself one with them. He who has come to take the sinner's place, came to be baptized by John so that he might be identified with those that he was coming to save. Jesus is identifying with his people, he's becoming one of them, and that is the key to 'fulfilling all righteousness.' It's the key to God's plan of salvation. Jesus is Israel reduced

to one, he's all of humankind reduced to one, he's the representative man, the one who takes the sins of the world on himself. He became one of us, so he could die on our behalf, so that through his sacrifice we might experience the forgiveness of God.

So this startling act of humility sets the tone for Jesus' whole ministry. It sets up everything. God become man, become one of us, not standing over us in judgment, but standing alongside us in our problems. Using biblical language, he who knew no sin took on the likeness of sinful flesh and walked alongside us, showing us a better way, and then in the end, he became sin for us so that we might be free of our sin and right before God.

What a beautiful beginning to the ministry of Jesus we see in this passage! Does it strike you

in the same way? Two extraordinarily humble men, one a mighty prophet of God the other God himself, each submitting humbly to each other and in so doing showing the whole world the greatness that is only found in humility. It's like a showdown in humility between the two greatest people to ever walk the earth. Are you challenged again today to be humble like John, humble like Jesus? Just think about it. The God of the universe born in a stable and working most of his life with his hands as a carpenter. Then he begins his three years of public ministry after walking 100km, just a face in a large crowd, working his way up the queue to be baptised by John with all the rest of the people. Such incredible humility. Does your life reflect a humility like that of Jesus? I wish mine did.

As you continue to turn today's passage over

in your mind why not spend some time talking it over with God? You might pray for a humility that stands out shockingly in a world that is so focussed on personal achievement. You might pray for righteousness. You might thank God for your right standing with him that has been bought by Jesus when he paid for your sins on the cross. And you could then go on to ask God for increasing righteousness in the way your live. However today's passage has struck you, whatever is on your heart, take it to God now in prayer.

And tomorrow we'll be looking at one of the most significant moments in Jesus' ministry, and in human history, which isn't talking it up too much, so I hope you can join me.