



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Luke 2:1-10

"The Life of Christ: The Baptism of Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This morning will you turn with me, first of all, to the 2nd chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 2, and I want to read a few verses from the latter part of this chapter. You will remember that this is one of the birth narratives contained in the Gospel of Luke and after the account of the birth in Luke chapter 2, verses 1 through 20, the evangelist goes on to describe some events in our Lord's early life and these are the ones that we want to stress. So I want to read verses 21 through 24 first,

"And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the LORD, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord ;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Now will you turn on to verses 39 and 40?). And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. (And I want you especially to notice the 40th verse,) And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God

was upon him. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, 'Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing'. And he said unto them, 'How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Now will you take your Bibles and turn over to Matthew chapter 3 and let me read five verses which have to do with the baptism of the Lord Jesus for that is our subject today; Matthew chapter 3, verses 13 through 17. John the Baptist's ministry has begun and now we read in the 13th verse,) Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?' And Jesus answering said unto him, 'Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness'. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!'

May God bless this reading of his inspired word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of reading in Thy word. We thank Thee for its message concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the way in which Thou hast given us intimations of our Lord Jesus Christ's growth in wisdom, in favor with God and with men. And in this, Lord, we see the perfect humanity of the one who became our substitute.

And we thank Thee also, Lord, that in Thy word there are those strong intimations of his deity, because we know that had he not been the God-man, he could not be an effective substitute for us, who should be the Lamb of God to take away our sins. And so, we want to give Thee thanksgiving, and praise, and gratitude for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And we pray, O God, that as we open the word and consider these great events in his life that we may understand the movement of our God in human history through him. And may, O Lord, as a result of our understanding our lives be more in conformity to Thy will.

We pray especially for any in this audience who have not yet come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. May as we study him they be drawn and attracted to him and give their hearts to him. We thank Thee for all that he has done for us and pray, O God, that the Spirit may touch our hearts and bring us in faith to the foot of the cross upon Golgotha to say to him, "I thank Thee, O God, for Jesus Christ whom Thou hast given and I thank Thee, O Lord, for dying for me."

We pray, too, Lord, for those who are in this audience and whose hearts and troubled, and depressed, and disturbed, for we know that in our Lord Jesus Christ there is the peace of God that passes all understanding. And so, Lord, we pray that Thou wilt minister to each one of us today regardless of our spiritual condition and may our meeting together be profitable and edifying.

We commit our land to Thee, the ministry of the word of God today to Thee, our leadership in this country to Thee, those who are proclaiming the word outside of this land, and may, O God, the Lord's day today be a day in which Jesus Christ is glorified. And we commit our ministry to Thee today for Thy blessing upon us as we fellowship in Christ and listen to Thy word. For we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

[Message] In our morning Ministry of the Word meetings, we are considering, "The highlights of the Life of our Lord" as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and last Sunday morning, we looked at the birth of our Lord Jesus. And so, we move on to the next great event of his life and study today, "The Baptism of Christ."

From the opening stages of our Lord's ministry to the eve of its close, the shadow of the cross falls upon it. This has been very tellingly caught by Holman Hunt in one of his great paintings called *The Shadow of Death*. He has a young carpenter standing by his bench; it is late in the afternoon and the rays of the sun have come slanting in through one of the windows. It's about time to quit and the carpenter leans up from his bench and stretches himself so that the sun's rays flashing upon the figure cast the shadow of the cross on the wall that is behind him. It was the artist's way of saying that the cross of our Lord Jesus was inevitable.

Now in the beginning of the ministry, it is obvious that he is headed for a cross. And as the ministry grows, and as it continues, you can still see the shadow of the cross. I think of one of the most interesting incidents in all of the Gospels, which is recorded in the 10th chapter of the Gospel of Mark, our Lord Jesus, with the disciples, with the women, is on the way towards Jerusalem. And we read in Mark chapter 10 and verse 32, "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid."

Now this is one of the most startling incidents in all of our Lord's life. You can kind of sense the way in which Jesus, that strong lonely looking figure, began to lengthen

his steps as they moved toward the city of Jerusalem. He began to outpace the disciples. They seem to sense that something strange was in his heart and in his mind. And so they began to fall back as the journey is made toward Jerusalem and behind them there is still a third group, probably composed of the women who were associated with him in the last days of the ministry about the cross. Commentators have wondered, "What was our Lord thinking about?" as he made as if he were to go to Jerusalem.

Luke, a few days earlier, in his ministry had said, "He set his face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem and his face was as if he should make his way to Jerusalem." Sangster preached a great sermon which he entitled *His Destination is on His Face*. There was something about our Lord that had the sense of the numinous; something of the spiritual about it. And in the sense of this and in the conviction of it, the disciples themselves began to be amazed at the steps that he was taking and, furthermore, those who were with him began to be afraid.

Whenever we come into the presence of deity, we are afraid. And so here, as they made their way toward Jerusalem, the disciples themselves sensed that our Lord was occupied with the cross. Bengel, the German commentator, said a couple of centuries ago that "He was dwelling in his passion." and that, I think, is surely the interpretation of the incident. So from the beginning of his ministry to the end of his ministry, it was inevitable that Jesus Christ should go to the cross.

I have some good friends who teach the Bible very, very well. I should say they teach it a great deal better than I, but I want to say this, that I think in one respect they are wrong. I've heard them say that Jesus came to present a kingdom and with that I fully agree. It is quite obvious that he came to present a kingdom, but there could never be a kingdom apart from a cross and Jesus Christ was not in ignorance of his destiny. He knew that that which lay ahead of him was the cross and he knew that this kingdom which he was offering was not a kingdom apart from a cross, but a kingdom by means of

the cross. And as you read the gospel accounts, it is inevitable that in the beginning of our Lord's ministry, the shadow of the cross was falling across it.

Now the baptism account, I think you're going to see, is an incident in which the shadow of the cross is very evident. The narratives of the baptism of the Lord Jesus in Matthew and in Mark and in Luke created acute difficulties for the early church. As a matter of fact, when you read the rabbinic writings, you do not read any evidence of a Messiah being baptized. And so, the idea of a Messiah being baptized was something new, but the difficulties of the baptism account are obvious. John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. How could our Lord Jesus submit to a baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins? Was he not the sinless one? It doesn't take much Bible understanding to sense that this account would create tremendous theological difficulties for the early church.

For this reason, I know this account is genuine. It is not an account which was invented by the early church and I think that you can see this, of course, in the remainder of the accounts of our Lord's life. But I mention this because so many cursory readers of the Bible look at it and attempt to make fun of the Bible. Because they see difficulties, but never bother to realize that if the church had common intelligence, and all grant that they do, there hardly has ever been a group of men who were so lifted up by God to write the literature that they have written that hardly a group of men like this has ever lived. This literature has persisted down to the present day. They may have not been to the schools, many of them, but they were very, very intelligent men and they very early would have discovered that this account created difficulties for them if it was merely a forgery. But the fact that it is contained in the word is evidence of the fact that it is part of God's word.

Now, of course, this I say is not a church invention, but if you look at the gospel itself, you will discover that Jesus himself is the one who gives us the interpretation of the event. It is not until the 20th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew that we really sense the

significance of the baptism of the Lord Jesus. But we don't have to look that far to get the full significance of it. It is obvious in the voice that comes from heaven and in the vision that our Lord and that John saw, for John's Gospel tells us that he saw it. That in this voice and in this vision, we have an interpretation of the event that satisfies all of the apparent difficulties connected with it.

The baptism is the second crisis in the life of our Lord upon the earth, but, of course, it occurs many years after his birth. Jesus was born in the year 6 or 7 B.C. And so, this was about 27 A.D. when the baptism took place.

In between we have the hidden years; the years in which the Bible gives us very little information concerning the life of Christ. There are only hints that suggest that Jesus Christ was completely obedient. They yield a kind of whisper of the perfect obedience of the Son of God.

His infinite infancy is recorded in Luke chapter 2 in the passage that I read. He was circumcised. He was presented in the temple and then began life's progress from innocence to holiness. He, after all remember, had perfect human nature, but it was not perfect human nature that was perfect or mature at the time that he was born. But he must pass through all the stages of obedience to God in order that in experience our Lord Jesus Christ's human nature might reach the perfection or the maturity that God intended that it should. The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews says, "He learned obedience." Now he did not learn to obey, but he learned obedience. That is, he experienced obedience in his life. He learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Then there was his childhood.

We do not know much about the childhood of our Lord Jesus. We know that he developed physically. We know that he developed mentally and we know that he developed spiritually. We read, "And the child grew." That's a kind of general statement and then it's interpreted, "And he waxed strong in spirit filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him." Physical, mental, spiritual development, then there was the

religious coming of age and at twelve, he was taken up to Jerusalem and there he came of age spiritually or religiously. I do not think that this incident recorded in Luke chapter 2 is a kind of Bar Mitzvah service. But this, of course, is in harmony with that custom that exists among the Jews today. And so, about at that age, he was in Jerusalem and there the rights of the Jews were carried out with respect to him.

Now he went into the temple and there he was discussing things with those who were the leaders in the nation. I rather think that this was not a kind of official service. There is indication that there was an official service, but there are indications about it that seem to suggest that this was kind of informal. And so, Jesus sat down with the great religious leaders of the day and he began to ask them questions and they were asking him questions.

If I can just imagine what might have been happening at this time, you will notice it was the feast of the Passover. I just have a hunch that our Lord Jesus asked them these clear or pellucid questions that were designed to clear up the Passover significance. I'm quite sure, in my own mind, from his own study of the Scripture, which began upon the lap of Joseph, when he was taught the Great Schema Israel and the Ten Commandments that Jesus had come to an understanding of some of the great things that are written in the Old Testament. And I think that as they discussed the significance of the Passover that his questions must have been designed to clear away all of the rubbish of tradition and get to the true significance of the fact that one day there would come a Lamb of God who would fulfill that Passover account.

His youth is described in verse 52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." That is a kind of human touch that I feel is surely true to the facts too. Jesus must have been a favorite in the city of Nazareth. He must have been a person as a youth to whom the children came with their questions and with their fun. He was the one who perhaps mended their toys when they were broken. And, furthermore, I think he was the one upon whose lips the elders also hung. For you

know, there are always older people who are interested in the companionship of fine young people and Jesus was a favorite in the little village of Nazareth.

His ministry had not yet begun and he had not yet begun that ministry which brought under conviction so many of the people who were in the land of Palestine. But here, he was a favorite of the people, the God-man; a mystery, but not a problem. One who increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.

I wish I had time to say something about the place where our Lord lived. Occasionally, we are inclined to think that Nazareth was a kind of sticks in Palestine. We think of him as living in a kind of back water of history, but that is not true. Our Lord Jesus Christ's understanding of political affairs in his day did not come to him supernaturally.

It came because Nazareth was very strategically located. It was located where traveled from east to west past. It was also located on the great route from the north to the south. And, furthermore, a Roman garrison was stationed in the little city of Sepphoris nearby. And if, as our numismatologists have pointed out, the coins of the day told the history of the day and that is true, then with the Roman soldiers constantly passing through the little village of Nazareth, it is obvious that Jesus became acquainted with the great things that were happening in the world. You can study the history of coins and go back to the coins of the New Testament times and a great deal of the history of the time is found upon the superscriptions of the coins.

Now I know that Jesus was interested in this for he himself called for a coin once in his ministry and asked, "Whose superscription is it, God's or Caesar's?" you'll remember. And so, there is evidence that our Lord Jesus was well acquainted with political affairs of the day. He spoke about the kings of the Gentiles. Made reference to Herod as being a fox and other indications of the fact that he was acquainted with things that were going on not only in the land of Palestine, but all over the world of that day.

He had a bustling family life, too, with a number of brothers and some sisters. We do not know how many sisters, the Bible does not tell us, but he had a great number of relatives in the north. As you know, John the apostle was his first cousin, John's mother and Mary being sisters. And so, he had relatives at Capernaum. He had relatives in the north and, furthermore, he had relatives in the south. You'll remember that John the Baptist was a relative of the Lord Jesus for Elizabeth, the mother of John, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were kinswomen. And so, there was a great family in the north and there was a great family in the south.

There is, however, not a whole lot of indication that Jesus was very closely connected with John the Baptist. No doubt, he knew who he was and he knew that he was related to him, but apparently, they had not been together too often, which is understandable due to the distance that separated them.

Jesus was a carpenter. He trod the path of daily duty. He learned dependence. He learned dependence upon Joseph and he learned all of dependence that that occupation required. His life someone has said "Was sensitive as a shadow, selfless as a shadow, and obedient as a shadow" and that is reflected in these accounts.

We do not know the personal appearance of our Lord Jesus. Thomas Carlisle once said, "Men never think of painting the face of Christ until they have lost the impression of him in the heart" and that is true.

It's amazing, you know I go around the country and quite frequently I walk into Christian homes and there is a big picture of our Lord Jesus: sometimes the praying Christ, sometimes the shepherd Christ, sometimes the head of Christ. Perhaps, most often that. I always think within my heart, "Is it possible that we have lost the impression of Jesus upon our hearts so that we have to look at a picture in order to remember that he is about us?" It really is a kind of thermometer of spiritual conditions. And so, you won't find any pictures of our Lord Jesus in my house. I invite you to come. If you do find any, come and accuse me of idolatry and we'll burn the picture together, because I do not

want any pictures of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not want to have any other impression of him than the impression that I find in the word of God.

Now if you go out and burn your pictures, then at least we will have gotten home to you in one point today. As far as his personal appearance is concerned, we cannot be sure. I often hear that Jesus could have played linebacker for the Green Bay Packers. He must have been a great man of strength. Well, there is some evidence that Jesus was of tall and powerful stature.

It's kind of indirect evidence. It's this, the Jews had a concept that anyone who reflected the glory of God must be of tall and powerful stature. And furthermore, they had customs to the effect that the Messiah, when he came, and the great prophet when he came, should have certain physical characteristics. And if our Lord Jesus could have been accused from these angles of criticism, they would surely have done it, but they do not appear in the New Testament accounts. And so, while I cannot be sure, and I do not want to make much over this, I'm quite sure, in my own mind, that Jesus was completely a man. He was not a kind of sissy as he's so often pictured in our pictures.

Now there is one other fact of his personal appearance that is recorded in John, which I think is very illustrative of the spiritual look that must have been upon his face. When the Jews looked at him and when he spoke about Abraham, they said to him, "Why you're speaking about Abraham, but you are not yet fifty years of age."

Now our Lord, of course, was in his early thirties at the latest and yet they looked at him and said, "You're not fifty." It is possible that because of the sufferings through which he went, that there was reflected upon his face the aging process, but I'm not really sure about that. And so, we'll just leave it with the scriptural record, but we want now to think just before we look at the baptism itself about his knowledge and understanding of the truth of God.

You know, it's very interesting that in the Gospel of John, when they hear the Lord Jesus teach, they say of him, "How knoweth this man letters having never learned?"

How knoweth this man letters having never learned?" What did they mean by that? Why they meant by that that Jesus had all of the knowledge that one gains from attending the academy in Jerusalem, but they sensed that he had never been to the school.

He was not a person, who had been taught in the academic environment of his day, but he was a man who had studied God's word and he had also looked at nature with the perfect understanding that comes to one who is obedient to God. And he learned from nature and he learned from God's word. He learned from God's revelation the things that convinced men that, though he had never been to their schools, he knew everything that the school men could teach him.

Now young men especially, I want to say to you this morning that you often think that in order to know God and to know the truth, you must go to a theological seminary. Now that is not true at all. In fact, I know from my own personal experience that some of the wisest men whom I have ever known are men who never darkened the doors of a theological seminary. And I'm so happy because they have that kind of pellucid understanding of the truth that comes from direct reflection and in direction with it through God's word. And it's amazing the things that God is able to teach a man about his word if he will simply go to it.

I'm not saying that you should not investigate knowledge and learning in the secular sphere, of course, we should. We should have every bit that we can. I want you to go to the university. I want you to go to the colleges and learn everything that you possibly can, but subject everything to the truth of God's word. And you who are sitting in this audience and you've never been to theological seminary, don't you feel awed by these young men who come in with a Greek testament and sit in the audience as if they know everything. They don't know everything. In fact, often I say this and I really mean it, that we graduate men from theological seminary with a great big head and a little scrawny shriveled up body. That is, they've never lived much of the truth that they have in their heads.

Now I know I get too excited about this because I might drive them away, but nevertheless, it is true and I think they know it as well as I. In fact, I think they're probably saying, "Hallelujah" right now, you know, that I'm saying this because we need to be reminded of it. Jesus was a man who knew, but he had never studied in the schools of his day. He was a man who had that direct knowledge that comes from God.

The amazing thing about that text too, by the way, is the fact that they say, "How knoweth this man never having learned?" and that word is the same word that is used of the Apostle Paul, a man who had attended the schools, when Festus said to him, "Why, Paul, much learning hath made thee mad." In other words, Jesus had what Paul had and Paul had gone to the schools, but Jesus had not.

Now we come to the baptism and I want to briefly go through the account today in order to point out the main significances of it. For, you see, this hidden year period has intervened between the birth and the baptism. Well, finally when the voice of prophecy rang out in the land of Palestine with the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus put down his tools at the carpenter's bench and made his way down to the river Jordan in order to be baptized by John.

When he met John face to face, what a memorable meeting this was. John the Baptist, that great rugged figure, who was clothed in a hairy garment with a leathern girdle about it, that rugged man who had lived on locusts and wild honey, that man who had begun his ministry a few months previously by going out all over the land of Palestine and calling everybody to come and repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

He must have been a remarkable man and an absolutely fearless man. A man whose heart was fearless because he knew that he was right with God and when a man is right with God, there is a sense of fearlessness about him that does not come from anything else. And he stood and he put his finger upon the sins, not only of the people, but especially upon the leaders. The Pharisees and Sadducees came out to see him. The

soldiers came out to see him and he had some words for each one of them as this strong, rugged man looked at these men, he didn't hesitate one moment to say, "You are living in sin" and when they cried out and said, "What should we do?" He gave the prescription to them.

But one day there was a man who came before John the Baptist and the great heart of this rugged man, the man of rock turned to water, because he looked into the face of this man who stood before him so majestic, so pure in the purity that came from his own perfect human nature, and John the Baptist, the great prophet, quailed before the man of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. And John said when Jesus came to be baptized, "O, I cannot baptize you."

I do not know how John sensed this. I think that he looked in our Lord's eyes and saw something there that was absolutely unique. He made have had some intimations of it because of previous contact or it may have been at just that moment, the Spirit of God spoke to his heart. He had already had some indication of the fact that he should look for someone like this and he had preached about him. In fact, he had been told the one upon whom you see the Spirit of God descending that person is the Messiah, the Son of God. And so, when Jesus came, he said, "No, I have need to be baptized of Thee and comest Thou to me?"

And now we have the first words of our Lord in the Gospel in Matthew in verse 15, "Suffer it to be so now, John: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness'. In other words, the King must fill all the righteous requirements of the law and since God is in the ministry of John the Baptist, remember later on he says, "The baptism of John from whence was it of heaven or from men?" and Jesus sensed that it was of God and this was the movement of the program whereby he should become the King. And so, he himself came to John, not to confess his sins, but he came to John in order to identify himself with the nation Israel and confess that within his heart, he too as an obedient Israelite was looking for the King that was to come. He was that King as a matter of fact, and he too,

in order to be obedient as an Israelite must identify himself with the program of God and be baptized by John the Baptist. "So suffer it to be so now, John" and he was baptized.

Now Matthew says that this baptism and confession of our Lord Jesus was confirmed by the visible act of baptism. Then the vision and the voice and just for a moment, I want you to notice particularly what happened, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him."

He was a student of the Old Testament and he knew that the absolutely necessary requirement that would confirm him as the Messiah of Israel was the coming of the Spirit upon him. He had read Isaiah chapter 42 and verse 1, "I have put my Spirit upon him." He had read Isaiah chapter 61 and verse 1, "That he should be anointed of the Holy Spirit." And so, when the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of the dove this, of course, was a vision to him that confirmed the conviction that he had gained in his heart from the study of God's word. But a voice also was heard, John apparently did not hear the voice though he saw the vision, John's Gospel says. The voice from heaven said, "Lo, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Now I want to stop here for just one moment and point out something that it absolutely necessary for you to see in order to understand this account. This I say was the confirmation of his conviction and the voice also confirmed the vision which he had just seen. It was a kind of coronation formula that he heard, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Now to understand this, I must put you in the place in which our Lord was at this time. He knew the Old Testament, you see, and so often we do not know our Old Testaments. And when that word came from heaven, "This is my Son", Jesus' mind went immediately to the second Psalm. That great Messianic Psalm in which the Psalmist presents the Messiah who is to rule and reign over the earth and he remembered that in that Psalm, the 7th verse it reads, "This is my Son, this day have I begotten Him." So he

took that passage that had to do with the Psalm, "Thou art my Son, I today have begotten Thee".

He put that together with the remainder of this, "in whom I am well pleased" and since he had studied the Book of Isaiah, he knew that this came from the 42nd chapter of Isaiah, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom I am well pleased" or in whom is all my delight. And so, taking the passage that referred to the King and the passage that referred to the Suffering Servant whose later ministry is described as a suffering unto death whereby men should be redeemed at the baptism of our Lord Jesus it was made evident that he was the King who must suffer and, hence, when I say that Jesus came to present a kingdom through a cross. This is the basic meaning of this text, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." You are my beloved Son. I am delighted in you, but you must fulfill the ministry of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah described in the 42nd through the 53rd chapters of the great Book of Isaiah.

Now this is a tremendous incident. This is seen from the fact that the whole Trinity is involved. We have our Lord Jesus the Son being baptized. We have the Spirit in the form of a dove coming upon him and then we have the voice of the Father from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This is one of the great climatic events of our Lord's life.

Some people have wondered, "What kind of a life did Jesus live during the hidden years?" We have these little intimations that I have referred to, but is it really true that he never sinned? Well now, this statement that came from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" set the seal of perfection upon the hidden years. We know from this, we do not have to ask anything else that Jesus lived that thirty years in spotless purity, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Now as I close, let me just briefly point out the theological significance of the baptism. This is an enigma to many. You'll go in many churches and you'll hear the preacher as he baptizes someone say, "Now you want to follow the Lord in baptism?"

I wonder where we ever got that expression except from ignorance of holy Scripture. "Follow the Lord in baptism?" why that is absolutely impossible. We cannot follow Jesus in his baptism. His baptism was absolutely unique. And so, we cannot follow him in baptism. This is not Christian baptism that Jesus Christ undergoes. How ignorant of Scripture do we have to be to make statements like that? This is not Christian baptism.

What is it? Well, in the first place, it is Jesus Christ's identification with the nation. The dove, you see, was the great figure of Israel and the dove coming upon our Lord Jesus identified him as the typical Israelite. In fact, the representative Israelite, whose heart was right toward God. This was THE Seed of Abraham. And so, he took his place as THE Seed of Abraham, as THE typical Israelite, who would in his perfect obedience, supply that which every other Israelite had lacked.

It was also the inauguration of the Son of God into his Messianic office. Peter said later that "Jesus Christ was anointed." He was made Christ. That's what the word means. He was made Christ. He was made Messiah. He was identified as Messiah. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and he went about doing good. This is the sign and seal of the Messianic King. This is the sign and the seal of that era which Jesus would begin. But this endowment, I say, is not only for preaching, it is also for passion.

And finally, (I know you're happy) finally, so am I, my voice beginning to give out, this is the illustration of our Lord's ministry. When Jesus went down into the waters of baptism and came up out of the water's of baptism that event was designed to mirror the cross. In fact, this is why Jesus said some months later, "I have a baptism to be baptized with that you know not of." Baptism is his term for his death. He interprets the significance of baptism himself. Paul gives us little details in addition, but Jesus tells us that his baptism was his death. And so, right at the beginning of his ministry, we have the great illustration of that which he would do. He will die for us. So the waters of Jesus'

baptism were the waters of a death baptism. We'll never understand baptism until we understand that.

Now may I say one final word? This is a practical word. A few weeks ago, I read in a newspaper and looked on a certain page, the editorial page, and saw a little cartoon down at the corner. There was a car, two women were standing by, the left front tire of the car was flat and it really looked flat. And the two women were standing by it and one of them said to the other, "I know the theory of changing one." So often, you know, I think we know the theory of truth, but we do not really know the practical side of truth. And so, I want to try to stress the practical side of the truth in a few moments here now.

Did you notice the words that John said to Jesus? "Comest Thou to me?" You know those four words; "Comest Thou to me?" are a kind of summary of the initiative that God takes in man's salvation, "Comest Thou to me?" The reason that Jesus went to John to be baptized of him was ultimately that he might be the Messiah who should die and that we might have everlasting salvation.

And the idea that he took the initiative in it is one of the great truths of holy Scripture. I don't think I'll ever get over that. "With pitying eye, the Prince of Peace beheld our helpless grief: he saw and oh amazing love, he flew to our relief." When Jesus went to the baptism, he had you and me upon his heart. He wanted to carry out the ministry of the Messiah that would lead to the salvation of men and, hence, this is tremendously important to us. It's not just a doctrine.

Tuesday night, in the opening of a Bible class that I am having, when the class was over, I opened it up for questions. I had made some rather radical statements and I'd warned them when I made them that they were radical. I talked about revelation and I had said that religion is man's attempt to ignore God's revelation. And I talked about the fact that we ignore it in various ways. We ignore it by legalism, thinking that we can do something to make points with God. We ignore it by mysticism looking for some kind of experience whereby we think God is pleased with us, or we can ignore it by rationalism

in which we try to reason out a way of approach to God on a human level entirely. And I said, furthermore, a lot of this religion that you are engaged in is absolutely worthless so far as God is concerned. And when I finished, I got the questions.

One woman spoke up immediately, she said, "You mean all these things I've been doing in the church are not doing any good at all? I've been going to church. I've been working in the Ladies' Auxiliary. I've been doing this and doing that." And I said, "Now wait just a minute. I didn't say everything was absolutely worthless. I said it was worthless if you think that's the way you're going to get to God." And then another woman right near me spoke up and said, "Yes."

Well, I had gone on to say, "Now you see it's absolutely necessary that you have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ." Religion is not going to get us to God. Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is a relationship to a risen Savior who has died for us whom we must receive personally. Well, the woman, a very wonderful looking woman, sitting about ten feet from me just blurted out, "That's what I want to know. I want to know how to know Jesus Christ personally."

And so, I had a wonderful opportunity about half the class I feel are not very sure of anything spiritually. I had a wonderful opportunity to talk to her for everybody about the gospel and I explained to her that in order to become a Christian, all you had to do was to recognize that Jesus Christ had died for you and that all you had to do was just to say to him, "Thank you, Lord, for dying for me. Thank you, Lord, for giving yourself for me upon the cross at Calvary." And I said that is the expression of faith.

And her face just lit up like this and when the meeting was over, she came up to me and she said, "Do you know I have been fifty-two years in the Christian church and I have never been told how to become a Christian." She said, "I have been responsible for the building of a chapel on our church (apparently a very wealthy person) and I have never had anyone explain to me how to be saved." And she said, "Furthermore, I listened

to Billy Graham all last week on the TV and he spoke about being reborn again, but he never told me how. For the first time in my life, I've been told how."

Now isn't it a terrible thing? Do you want to know how to be saved? All you need to do is to say, as you see that Christ died for you, "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying for me. I take you as my personal Savior." Right in the heart; say that to him and when you do, God gives you new life. You are born again. You are forgiven. You have everlasting life. You have been saved. You've become a child of God. Your destiny is settled. Have you made that decision? If you haven't, we invite you to put your faith and trust in him who loved you and gave himself for you. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father who gave the Son, the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit who came upon him in the form of the dove inaugurating his great ministry of suffering and exaltation, be in abide with all who know him in sincerity. And, O Father, if there are some here who have not yet believed in him, O give them no rest or peace, until they turn in simple trust and thank Thee for the gift of the Son in the heart. May Thy mercy, Thy blessing go with us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.