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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

WALKING IN THE JORDAN”
Matthew 3:13-17

Start walking with Jesus and you will almost certainly discover that He is different than you assumed.

→ We expect him to be full of easy comfort. Instead, He decrees, {M7 16:24} **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”**

→ We expect him to turn a blind eye to our lesser sins. Instead, He dares us, {Mt 5:48} **“Be perfect ...as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

→ We expect him to share our grudges. Instead, He demands: {Mt 5:44} **“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**

→ We expect him to sweep away the gutter sinners, atheists and jihadists in a fiery cataclysm. Instead, He directs us to {Mt 9:13} **“go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

Jesus is simultaneously fiercer and kinder, stronger and gentler, more terrifying and more hospitable than we ever imagined.

● Even John the Baptizer, who was ordained to {Mt 3:3} **“Prepare the way for the Lord,”** was thrown off balance by Jesus when he met him. Please turn to Matthew 3.

○ In verses 13-14 **“Jesus [comes] from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized.”** John tries to **“deter him,**

saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’” His reluctance is understandable.

❖ For one thing, John preaches {Mk 1:4} **“a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** {Mt 3:2} **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,”** he cries.

📖 Repentance has two essential components.

➤ One is confession, whereby we consciously agree with God that we have sinned, by what we have done and left undone.

➤ The other is a reordered life, in which we aggressively reject sin and seek right relationship with God, self, and others.

☼ But Jesus is the {Jn 1:29} **“Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** He has nothing to repent, no sins to be forgiven, no reordering to do.

❖ Besides, John’s ministry is narrow in scope and modest in effect. His tools are limited to fiery words and muddy water. The best he can do is help prepare people for the coming kingdom.

● Jesus is infinitely {Mt 3:11} **“more powerful.”** He will cause {Rev 11:15} **“The kingdom of the world”** to **“become the kingdom of our Lord...and he will reign forever and ever.”**

☼ Jesus is {Col 1:15-18} **“The Son...the image of the invisible God.”** He **“is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** He is the One whom the Father has elected to **“have the supremacy”** **“in everything.”**

The perfect, powerful Messiah humbly presents himself for baptism? No wonder John

protests, **“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”**

○ Still, in verse 15 **“Jesus [replies], ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’”** Fulfilling **“all righteousness”** means doing everything that is right and necessary to accomplish God’s plan.

Hence, Jesus submits to **“a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”** in order to:

- ✧ Formally dedicate himself to his mission;
- ✧ Publicly reveal himself as the Messiah;
- ✧ Validate John’s ministry before Israel and all who will become Christ Followers (including us); and,
- ✧ Identify with the sinners He has come **“to seek and to save.”** Did you catch that? Jesus submits to **“a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”** in order to identify with sinners!

I knew a dear saint who could not get her heart around this. She thought Jesus only *appeared* to be tempted, only *seemed* to wrestle with his mission. She could not accept that his sinlessness involved genuine struggle, or that He labored to learn obedience.

→ Yet {Jn 1:1, 14} **“the Word”** who is God truly **“became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** Although He retained his divine status, the Lord {Php 2:7} **“made himself nothing”** (literally, **“emptied himself”**) **“by taking the very nature of servant, being made in human likeness.”**

→ Despite the fact that Jesus {Heb 4:15} **“did not sin,”** he was **“tempted in every way, just as we are.”** In fact, while we in our {Heb 12:4} **“struggle against sin...have not**

yet resisted to the point of shedding [our] blood,” Messiah did: {Heb 12:2} **“For the joy set before him he endured the cross.”**

By submitting to **“a baptism of repentance”** Jesus declares: {Wright, par.} **“Yes, I have come to fulfill God’s plan. [I] will bring the fire of just judgment on evil. But...I must do it: by humbly identifying with God’s people, by taking their place, sharing their penitence, living their life and ultimately dying their death.”**

In light of all this, walking with Jesus means:

- ☆ Repenting of our sin.

Though Christ’s mission and message transcend those of John, they share the same starting point: **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”**

And while the result of Christ’s ministry is that we are saved, {Eph 2:8-9} **“not by works,”** but **“by grace... through faith,”** his mercy and kindness do not eliminate our ongoing need to confess our sin and reorder our thoughts, words and deeds accordingly.

- ☆ It means pursuing righteous obedience.

→ To be sure, if performed in human strength even {Is 64:6} **“our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”** {Gal 3:11} **“No one is justified before God by”** doing good works.

→ Nevertheless, we have been {Eph 2:10} **“created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** {Jas 2:17} **“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”**

→ Philippians 2:12-13 holds the answer to this puzzle: **“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”**

God’s Spirit dwells within his people. He gives us the desire and the capacity for obedience as we engage in right relationships with God, self, and others.

☆ And it means identifying with Jesus as He identified with us.

→ Romans 8:29 {NLT} reveals that **“God knew his people in advance, and chose them to become like his Son.”** We cannot take on deity as God’s Son took on flesh; but we can {TNIV} **“be conformed to [his] image.”** Our attitudes, thoughts, words and actions can increasingly resemble those of Jesus.

God conceives, births, and empowers these changes. Yet we can cooperate by reading and heeding the Word, studying Christ’s earthly life in the Gospels, engaging with God in prayer and worship, resisting evil, and serving others. Or not.

○ Verses 16-17: **“As soon as Jesus [is] baptized he [comes] up out of the water. At that moment heaven [is] opened, and he [sees] the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven [says], ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”**

● That initial phrase (“**This is my Son**”) is a direct quote of Psalm 2:7-8: **“I will proclaim the LORD’s decree: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the**

nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”

☼ All of the Lord’s Jewish neighbors interpret Ps 2 as a description of the Messiah, the victorious King who will conquer evil and restore righteousness. Not only is the Father validating Jesus’ unique sonship, He is also commissioning him to establish the kingdom of God in glory and in power.

It follows that walking with Jesus means:

☆ Honoring and serving Jesus as a co-equal member of the eternal and supreme Godhead.

Yes, Jesus is our best friend; but let us never mistake him for our peer. He is {Rev 19:16} **“KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS.”** {Php 2:10-11} **“At the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth,”** (though not all willingly) **“and every tongue [will] acknowledge”** (though not all gladly) **“that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** As his followers we have to opportunity to do so willingly, gladly, now.

☆ And it means helping to build the kingdom.

This would take a lifetime to explore in detail. In a nutshell, we do so by obeying God’s commands epitomized in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

● But that is not all. The second phrase (“**with him I am well-pleased**”) is a clear reference to **Isaiah 42:1: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight”** [with whom “I am

well pleased”]; “I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.”

📖 This is one in a series of texts called “servant songs” {Is 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12}, which foretell a servant whom God will {52:13} “[lift] **up and highly** [exalt]” **after He submits to redemptive humiliation and suffering on behalf of others.**

☼ Not only is the Father declaring his approval of his Son, He is also revealing that Jesus will establish the kingdom through the power of suffering love.

Consequently, walking with Jesus means:

☆ Enjoying him.

→ Following Jesus is a serious matter; yet it is neither grim nor boring. Jesus came {Jn 10:10} “**that [we] may have life, and have it to the full.**” What does the Word say? “The dullness of the LORD is our strength”? No! {Ne 8:10} “**The joy of the LORD is [our] strength!**”

Too often I approach discipleship as a tedious to-do list, a monotonous routine, business as usual. In reality, following Jesus is nothing like that! It is an adventure marked by beauty, surprise, challenge, (sometimes) danger, and blessing.

☆ And walking with Jesus means incarnating *αγαπε* love. It is manifesting God’s love, giving it concrete expression in what we say and don’t say, do and don’t do.

➤ One implication: the “how” of our actions is as important as the “what.” These days, many church-goers act as though the rightness of a cause justifies discourteous attitudes, rude words, and unkind deeds.

Jesus did say harsh words to his enemies, but He never lied or spread rumors. He never criticized to get even, never to whip up the crowds, never to destroy the opposition, never even to defend his honor.

Jesus spoke to protect others from false teaching, and to jolt his enemies into repentance so that they might be saved. He prayed for them. He ate with them. When they were receptive, He established friendships with them (Nicodemus is a case in point).

And it should go without saying that Jesus consistently rejected the use of violence. Instead, He suffered and died – not only for those who loved him, but equally for those who hated him.

The *how* of our actions is as significant as the *what*. {1 Co 13:4-8a}

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy... does not boast...is not proud. It does not dishonor others... is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs. Love ... rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Think, speak and act this way, and we will incarnate love as Jesus did.

Walking with Jesus means repenting of our sin, pursuing righteous obedience and identifying with him. It means honoring and serving Jesus, and enjoying him, and incarnating love.

This is the word of the Lord.