

# Divine Approval

Luke 3:21-22

## 1. Introduction.

- a. The Birth Narrative is over and we begin Jesus' preparation for ministry.
- b. This passage is the launching pad for Jesus' ministry and the rest of the Gospel.
  - i. A critical moment in the narrative.
  - ii. Jesus receives approval from the Father to begin his ministry of salvation, and is also empowered by the anointing presence of the Holy Spirit.
- c. These are two short verses, rich in meaning. Yet in the typical fashion of Luke, they're written in the unadorned language of a good historian.

## 2. The Setting (3:21-22a).

- a. Review of John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin (3:3).
  - i. The baptism was an outward symbol of the soon-to-come inward renewal.
    1. This inward renewal would be accomplished by the work of the coming Christ.
    2. It would then be applied by His subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).
  - ii. As the people would hear John preach, believe his message, he would then baptize them as a symbol of their sincerity to hope in the coming work of the Messiah.
- b. While all the people are being baptized, Luke records that Jesus is also baptized.
  - i. This is Jesus' first public appearance.
  - ii. Apart from that one moment in the Temple as a 12-year-old boy, Jesus has lived in relative obscurity for about 30 years (3:23).

- iii. He's not yet started a formal teaching ministry. He's not performed any miracles. He's not gathered any followers. Rather, He's been in subjection to his parent (2:51). He's been growing in both wisdom and stature, with both God and man – likely being trained as a rabbi.
    - iv. John's been in the spotlight, and Jesus has been relatively unknown in terms of public attention.
  - c. The baptism of Jesus raises some questions. Why did he need to undergo baptism, especially a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin?
    - i. 6 views:
      - 1. Jesus is conscious of personal sin. This view ignores the clear teaching of Jesus' sinless nature (c.f., Jn. 8:46, 2Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 9:14; etc.).
      - 2. The baptism shows Jesus' approval of John's ministry. This is odd, considering John was to point to Jesus.
      - 3. Jesus is showing himself to be a disciple of John. There's nothing in the text indicating this.
      - 4. The baptism is symbolic anticipation of Jesus' passion and expiation for sin. This is possible. However, it's a theological conclusion, not an exegetical conclusion.
      - 5. Jesus needed to "fulfill all righteousness" (c.f., Matt. 3:15).
      - 6. We don't know.
    - ii. Most of these views require you to jump outside of the text in some way. What's important to understand is that Luke doesn't actually give us the reason. However, we have an indication in Matthew's record of the baptism (Matt. 3:15).
      - 1. *"To fulfill all righteousness..."* [infinitive of purpose].
      - 2. John was God's prophet and, therefore, mouthpiece. John came commanding baptism. As such, if a true prophet of God commands something, true obedience demands you then obey the voice of the prophet.

- a. As such, since Jesus was perfectly obedient to the anything the Father commanded, it was necessary He also obey the exhortation of John.
  - b. So, Jesus was not baptized because he needed to repent, nor because He needed His sins forgiven. Rather, He was simply carrying out God's desire for a faithful Israelite. It was a righteously obedient act, and thereby fulfilment of one of God's righteous decrees.
  - c. This obedience showed Jesus to be what He truly was, righteous and sinless.
- iii. Very little attention is given to the baptism itself. Rather, the baptism functions to provide a public opportunity for Jesus to arrive on the scene.
- d. *"Heaven was opened."*
  - i. A phrase occurring through the Bible where either God appears, or God gives direct revelation. It's always a profound moment.
    - 1. Ezekiel 1:1.
    - 2. John 1:51.
    - 3. Acts 7:46.
    - 4. Revelation 19:11.
    - 5. Isaiah 64:1.
  - ii. When heaven opens at the baptism, both elements are present. God is both seen and gives direct revelation.
  - iii. This is the moment John knew Jesus was the Christ (c.f., John 1:33).
  - iv. This is also the moment we receive the testimony of the Father, Himself. We've seen a lot of testimony concerning Jesus, but this is the pinnacle of those.
- e. The decent of the Spirit is the symbol of God's divine approval of the Son as Messiah.

- i. The imagery of the Spirit coming upon Jesus is picking up on the role of the Spirit in the Old Testament.
  - 1. The Spirit would come upon people in a special way during Old Testament times.
    - a. Judges.
    - b. Kings.
  - 2. The Spirit would then empower them in a special way to carry out a specific ministry and task—and usually some form of deliverance.
- ii. Example: 1Samuel 16:13.
  - 1. David is anointed by Samuel with oil.
  - 2. The oil is explicitly representative of being anointed with the Spirit.
  - 3. David is then commissioned for the ministry of king. He’s received God’s anointing—the Spirit.
- iii. In light of this, the anointing of the Spirit upon Jesus is the Father’s divine commission, approving, and empowering for Jesus to begin His ministry of deliverance.
  - 1. In fact, the terms “Messiah (Heb.)” and “Christ (Gk.)” literally mean, “Anointed One.”
  - 2. So, this is the point in which Jesus comes into His formal Messiahship to carry out the ministry of what the Messiah was to accomplish.
  - 3. C.f., Luke 4:15ff.
- iv. The baptism of Jesus has very little to do with water. Rather, it has everything to do with the Father’s commissioning (and empowering) of the Son with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. That’s the focus of the text.
- v. Side note: The form of a dove is not saying the Spirit *was* a dove. Rather, He was *like* a dove.

1. Many speculate as to what this means, but we simply do not know.
2. It's the only time we see the Spirit made manifest.
3. The point, however, is the Spirit becomes physically seen, thereby functioning as a sign to John that Jesus is the Christ. It's the Father's public endorsement of the Son.

3. The Testimony (3:22b).

- a. Grammatically, the words of the Father are the main point of the entire passage.
- b. Again, whenever "heaven is opened," either God is seen, or gives direct revelation. He is seen in the descent of the Spirit, and now the Father's about to give direct revelation through His audible words.
- c. There are three elements to the Father's statement. They're picking up on the Messianic prophecies of Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. All three must be present, or salvation through the Son is not possible.
  - i. Jesus is the Son – implying deity.
  - ii. Jesus is the beloved—implying the sending of the son was truly a sacrifice.
  - iii. Jesus is pleasing – implying Jesus would be an acceptable sacrifice.
- d. The entire moment is a Trinitarian reality.
  - i. The Father anoints.
  - ii. The Spirit empowers.
  - iii. The Son is commissioned.

4. Conclusion.

- a. The passage teaches the exclusivity, but also sufficiency, of Jesus as God's only means of salvation.
  - i. Jesus is the approved One.

- ii. Jesus is the Father's means through which He'll accomplish the work of salvation.
  - iii. Heaven has been opened, but Jesus, therefore, is the only way into that heaven.
- b. God's pleasure for us is based exclusively, then, on our relationship to Jesus Christ—the only One in Whom God finds His pleasure.
  - i. It is vitally important we be found in Christ.
  - ii. If we're in Christ, then this declaration of the Father over the Son (namely, His pleasure), becomes the same declaration of the Father over us.