

1st Sunday of Advent 2018

What did God tell Jesus at his Baptism?

(Psalm 2; Genesis 22:1-4; Isaiah 42:1-3)

Turn to Psalm 2 please. We'll get there eventually. What did God tell Jesus at his baptism?

This is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent means "coming," the coming of Christ. And in the church tradition of Advent Scriptures, God's people remembered both comings of Christ, the coming that happened at Christmas and also the second coming of Christ, for which we still wait. That combination of the two comings is the biggest reason I like Advent.

In the NT, every believer's life is above all a life between the comings. We enjoy the benefits of the first coming of Christ, and we wait for the benefits of the second coming of Christ. Every day our lives show that Christ came once, and changed many things, but he hasn't yet come the second time to change the rest. One down, one to go.

I wanted this sermon to teach about the two comings of Christ from the OT. It still is sort of that, and we'll talk about that. But this is mostly about what God told Jesus. When Jesus was baptized, God said, "You are my Son, whom I love; in you I delight."

What was going on between God and Jesus at that moment? Jesus has just been baptized by John. Let us define baptism this way: Baptism is saying to God, "God, I submit to you and all your plans for me, I will do what you want, and I want you and your blessing." In one word, baptism is our way of saying "yes" to God.

John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus does not need to do any of that. BUT, Jesus does want to say "yes" to God. There is a call of God on Jesus' life, too, and he needs to say "yes" to God. Jesus needs to say, "God, I submit to you and all your plans for me, I will do what you want, and I want you and your blessing."

When John appeared, preaching about the kingdom of God, and baptizing, Jesus knew that God was calling him into action, and Jesus needed to say "yes." So he was baptized. And God said to him: "you are my Son, whom I love; in you I delight."

Because we do not know the OT very well, we don't understand how much God was telling Jesus with those words. The words are completely true without reading the OT. Jesus was God's Son, God loved him, and God delighted in him. No doubt about any of that. But there's more.

If we have been paying attention to the Bible for some years, there are NT phrases that we know well. "Take this cup from me." "Can you drink the cup I drink?" "Turn these stones into bread." "Could you not watch with me for one hour?" "Before the rooster crows twice." "Get behind me Satan." "Why have you forsaken me?" "On the night he was betrayed ..."

Let us assume that Jesus, and most devout Jewish men and women by the time that they were 30 years old, knew their Scripture quite well. There are many OT phrases that Jesus and others around him would quickly recognize, and they would know the Biblical story around that phrase.

How much did Jesus know about his own calling, when he was baptized by John? He knows the stories about his miraculous birth, he knows that he has some special calling from God. He is probably pretty sure that he is the Messiah, and he knows he wants to obey the Father. Let's say he does not know much more than that.

Luke 2 tells us that *after* Jesus was 12 years old, he continued to grow in wisdom and in favour with God. Jesus went through his whole life growing in wisdom and in favour with God. I assume that continued until he died.

We sometimes assume that since Jesus was fully God, which he was, he was born knowing all that God knows. That is not at all the way the Gospels talk about Jesus. He was fully God and fully human, in one undivided and inseparable person, not half God and half man, but fully God and fully human. And he grew in wisdom and in favour with God.

We treat Jesus as if he was God in a body, faking humanity. The body was human, but the mind and soul were entirely God. We treat Jesus as if he had a "God-chip" in the back of his brain, feeding into him all that God knows and God feels.

We think that is good theology, but it is bad theology. Good theology says that Jesus' humanity was as full and real as his deity. The Gospel writers know that Jesus was the God-man, but they have no trouble showing his weakness, or his surprise at the faith of some and surprise at the hardness of others. He grew in wisdom all his life, and in favour with God, just as you and I do.

When John the Baptist appears, Jesus knows it is time to act. He starts by submitting to John's baptism to say "yes" to God's plans for him, just as all the others there were doing. And when he comes out of the water, God says, "You are my Son, whom I love; in you I delight."

Let's assume Jesus recognizes those lines from the OT. What did God just tell Jesus?

You Are My Son

Psalm 2 includes these words in v7: *I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me, "You are my son."* Let's suppose that when Jesus heard the voice from heaven say "You are my son," Jesus recognized that this was from Psalm 2.

So after the baptism was over, and he could get alone, he looked up Psalm 2 in his Bible. That's probably not how it happened, but something like that did happen. God had just told Jesus, "you are my son," so Jesus reads the whole psalm, with now knowing that Ps 2 is about him.

Imagine Jesus reading this with new eyes, now realizing this is God's call to *him*.

Psalm 2 *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?*

² *The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,*

³ *“Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.”*

⁴ *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.*

⁵ *He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*

⁶ *“I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”*

⁷ *I will proclaim the Lord's decree: He said to me,*

“You are my son; today I have become your father.

⁸ *Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.*

⁹ *You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*

¹⁰ *Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.*

¹¹ *Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling.*

¹² *Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.*

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

When God speaks to Jesus at his baptism, God quotes from Ps 2, and he's telling Jesus that Jesus is the Son of Psalm 2. He's telling Jesus that Jesus is the Messiah, the coming king, that the nations of earth are going to resist God and his Messiah, but that will be foolish. The Messiah will rule the nations. Honour the Messiah or be destroyed.

And that wonderful last line: *blessed are all who take refuge in him*. That's us. We have taken refuge in this Son, and for that reason God's blessing is on us.

This message, resisting God and his king is foolish, the son will rule the nations with a rod of iron, he can get angry and if people don't submit they will be destroyed – all this is about the second coming of Jesus.

It is the first thing God's voice said to Jesus, but most of this has not happened. It will happen when Jesus returns. The only thing that's happened is “*He said to me, you are my son.*” But the first phrase told Jesus how this all would end. The nations will be Jesus' inheritance, the ends of the earth his possession. God will do this for him. He's still waiting, as we are.

Whom I Love

Turn to Genesis 22. When Jesus was baptized, God said, “You are my son, whom I love; in you I delight.” “Whom I love.” “You are my son, whom I love.” Jesus will recognize that line too. So after reading Psalm 2, Jesus will turn to Genesis 22.

Genesis 22:1-2 *Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."*

At his baptism, God said to Jesus, "You are my son, whom I love." In Genesis 22, God said to Abraham, *Take your son, your only son, whom you love*. Pretty close. To Jesus: you are my son, whom I love. To Abraham: your son, your only son, whom you love.

What did this mean to Jesus? This one is awful. Ps 2 could be exciting, but Gen 22 is not exciting. God is telling Jesus that Jesus will be like Isaac to him. God will offer him as a sacrifice. God rescued Isaac from Abraham's hand, but who can rescue Jesus from God's hand? No one. That will not happen. God will offer Jesus as a sacrifice, father offering son.

This was not really a part of the OT view of the Messiah. It is certainly possible that Jesus found out on the day of his baptism that he would die as a sacrifice. He discovered this by realizing that his Father was using a phrase from Gen 22, "whom I love," in response to his baptism. This is what he had just said "yes" to.

And this is about Christ's first coming. First Jesus found out about the glorious end to his story, Psalm 2, and then he found out about hard things on the way, Genesis 22. God was saying, "You are the Messiah, my chosen king, and you are Isaac, my offering."

In You I Delight

Turn to Isaiah 42 please. "You are my son, whom I love; in you I delight." Isaiah 42. In Isaiah 42-53, those 12 chapters, the prophet Isaiah wrote four "servant songs." That's what they are called. The first servant song is in Isa 42:1-4.

Remember that right after Jesus was baptized, the Spirit came on him like a dove, and then he heard the words, "you are my son, whom I love; in you I delight." Now let's read Isa 42:1.

Isa 42:1 *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.*

God put his Spirit on Jesus, and said to him, "in you I delight." This tells Jesus that Jesus is the servant of Isaiah's servant songs. Let's read the rest of the first servant song, and read it as Jesus reading his instructions, his job description, reading to discover what God is calling him to do.

Isa 42:2 *He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.*

³ *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; ⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope."

Now let's read the first half of the 4th servant song, beginning Isa 52:13. Read it as Jesus would read it after his baptism, realizing for the first time that this is about him:

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

¹⁴ *Just as there were many who were appalled at him—*

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being

and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ *so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him.*

For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

⁵³ *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*

² *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.*

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.*

Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ *Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,*

yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;*

the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;*

and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Somewhere in Jesus' life, he realized that Ps 2 and Gen 22 and Isaiah's servant songs were his call from God. There is no doubt about that. If not at his baptism, somewhere else. From what we have in the Bible, I think it was vague to Jesus before his baptism. And once God said, "you are my son, whom I love; in you I delight," it was all clear.

Ps 2, "You are my son," is entirely about the second coming of Christ. Jesus has not seen that yet, and neither have we.

Gen 22, "my son whom I love," the father offering up Isaac, is entirely about the first coming of Christ. Jesus has seen that, it is over. That's why he said right at the end, "it is finished."

Isaiah's servant songs also mostly contain what Jesus already has done. Most of that also is about the first coming of Christ, although some of it is about future glory for the servant.

What did God tell Jesus at his baptism: "you are my son, whom I love; in you I delight"? He said, you are the son of Psalm 2, the chosen king, and you are the son of Genesis 22, the father's sacrifice, and you are the servant of Isaiah's servant songs, with Spirit-filled service and humiliating death for the iniquities of God's people. That's what God told Jesus at his baptism.

Minor point: What does God tell us at our baptism? In some ways, the same thing. “You are my daughter, whom I love, in you I delight.” “you are my son, whom I love, in you I delight.”

Christ will rule the nations. It is a common theme in Daniel 7 and in the NT that followers of Christ will rule with him after he returns. We will have power and authority, and our enemies will have to bow before us. He will not rule alone.

We will not give our lives to atone for the sins of others, only Jesus does that. But we will suffer many things, and we will be rejected, and humiliated. And these are not simply endured. As we endure them, being faithful to God as we are able, life goes out from us, kingdom gold increases, others receive hope and comfort, God’s glory increases. “Death works in us, and life works in you” says Paul in 2 Corinthians.

What God says to us at our baptism is similar to what God said to Jesus at his baptism.

But the real point today is that this is Advent, and we consider the two comings of Jesus. Jesus came once, and he did what the father told him at his baptism to do. He was the “Isaac: son, and he was the servant of Isaiah. Jesus was faithful.

Now he is sitting at God’s right hand, waiting for God to make his enemies a footstool for his feet, and Jesus will return and finish up the task he was given at his baptism. And that will be wonderful for us.

He will take the ends of the earth as his possession, and we will receive the rest of the blessing that comes to those who take refuge in the Son God loves. Amen.