

The Unseen Authentication of the Son

⁹ It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

¹² Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

A little over a week ago, on October 21st, the universe was supposed to be destroyed by fire. After originally predicting that the rapture would occur on May 21, Harold Camping, an American radio preacher, released the following statement: "Indeed, on May 21 Christ did come spiritually to put all of the unsaved throughout the world into judgment. But that universal judgment will not be physically seen until the last day of the five-month judgment period, on October 21, 2011." As we know, October 21st came and went, and the universe was not judged by God on that day. Harold Camping reportedly retired from Family Radio on October 16th, days before the supposed apocalypse.

While the world continues to laugh, spare a thought for the many who had placed their hope in Harold Camping's teachings and calculations. Some gave up huge amounts of money. Some made significant life-decisions based upon his predictions. There were even reports of suicides, with some responding in panic to Camping's ideas. Today, Camping's church is nearly empty, and the many who spent thousands upon his false teaching must feel completely shipwrecked. I will not be surprised to see many of them abandoning the faith altogether, disillusioned, confused and in despair that any religious figure can be trusted.

It is a huge thing to place your life and destiny into the hands of another. If it is a wrong move, like trusting Harold Camping, it may be catastrophic for your life and future.

Those of us who call ourselves Christians, have placed our life and destiny into the hands of Jesus Christ. We believe He is the truth, and the life and the way to God the Father. But how do we know? Who is to say that Jesus is more trustworthy than Harold Camping? Why should we trust in Him, and be assured that the same humiliation which Camping's followers have endured does not also await us?

To place your life in the hands of Christ requires some reasons. How do we know that Jesus was the sinless Son of God, qualified to be our Saviour and Messiah?

Sometimes men's opinions are faulty. Before Jesus ever went public and received testimony from man, there were two unseen validations, two certifications that took place without people seeing or understanding them. And yet, they are two of the most powerful statements of who our Saviour truly is, and why He is qualified to save.

We can know that Jesus is the true Saviour, able to save us, because of two authenticating events. They were the two events that began His ministry. As we study them, we'll see more reason for our faith in Christ to grow and strengthen.

I. Jesus Was Authenticated by the Trinity's Testimony

⁹ It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

John the Baptist's ministry is in full swing. Crowds are coming to him, hearing for the first time, the sound of a true prophet. One day, one of many of the hundreds queuing up on the banks of the Jordan, is a man. He is not extraordinary in appearance. No one is following him. He is standing in line with everyone else to get to John. He comes from an almost unheard-of town in northern Israel – Nazareth. He is a carpenter by trade. He is about the same age as John.

He is Jesus – Yeshua – who has emerged from years of silence and obscurity to begin His mission. No records exist of any miracles He performed before this day. Besides his encounter with the scribes in the Temple at age twelve, we have no record of any of His sayings before this time. Instead, God's will was that His Son live in obscurity and anonymity, as the first-born son of Mary, older half-brother to James, Joses, Simon, Jude, and several sisters, as carpenter and citizen of Nazareth.

Although He looked so ordinary, how remarkable He is. Here is the man before whom wise men from the Orient came and presented gifts before His cradle, thirty years earlier. Here is the man about whom angels praised before some lowly shepherds. This is the One that the prophets saw and spoke about – Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Malachi – they saw him in their visions. Here He is – a Man among men, and yet God the Son.

What is He doing? He is here to be baptised by John. But why? John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. Verse 5 tells us that the people were baptised, “confessing their sins”. Was Jesus here to confess sins? Was Jesus one who needed to repent?

No. As we know from Matthew and Luke, John the Baptist initially refused Jesus. He told Him, “I need to be baptised by *you*, and are you coming to be baptised by *me*?” He wanted to refuse Jesus baptism, until Jesus instructed him to do it.

This tells us that Jesus was not being baptised for exactly the same reasons as all the people around Him. What was the reason? Why was Jesus baptised?

A lot of reasons have been proposed. Some say it was to point towards His eventual death and resurrection. Some say it was to identify with humanity. Some say it was to sanctify baptism itself. Some say it was the act of being consecrated as our High Priest.

The answer is best seen in thinking about what John was doing. While John's was a baptism of repentance, it was mainly a baptism of identification. The Israelites who were being baptised were saying, 'We identify with the message of righteousness that you preach, John. We distance ourselves from the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. Yours is the true religion of Israel, and we confess we have sinned and gotten away from it. We repent, and want to identify with it, and be ready for the righteous Messiah.'

So when Jesus comes to be baptised, He is really doing the same thing. He is, as a man, saying, this is the true faith of Israel, preached by the prophets. This is the message I am connected with. Here is the true representative of God's Word, and I, symbolically submit to it.

Jesus is showing, once again, as He did so often, His total submission and humility. He has no sins to confess or repent of, but to fulfil all righteousness, He wants to be identified with the only lawful religious authority in the land.

What a contrast, in the behaviour of Jesus, with so many we meet today. So great are they in their own estimation, that they are deeply offended when asked to submit to the authority of a local church. They are such gifts to God, that they are outraged when asked to give their testimony to other, every-day Christians. Their pulse quickens and their breathing becomes laboured when we call on them to begin to show their faithfulness by washing the feet of ordinary Christians in ordinary churches. How insolent of us! The nerve, that we should think of limiting their enormous abilities to an unglamorous local church!

Let us leave those eagles, soaring in the stratosphere of their own egos, and come down to our Christ. Because here, low, below sea level, we find the eternal Word, the Creator Himself, waist deep in the Jordan, facing a rough man in camel's skin. Here He is, who had every right to expect worship, and He is submitting.

No one, except John himself, understood who this was. But consider what happened right after Jesus submitted to baptism, and John submitted to Jesus' request:

¹⁰ And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. ¹¹ Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Isn't it interesting how often God confirms that a man is His after the man submits? Jesus identifies with the message of John, possibly confusing observers into thinking He too is repenting. But as He submits to that, what does He receive? He receives, as it were, applause from God Himself.

No one except Jesus and John saw this vision. John speaks of it in John 1:32-33, but no one else heard or saw it. In another incident where God spoke from heaven, those around simply heard thunder.

This was not a public testimony, it was private at the time. The public authentication of Jesus would come through His many miracles. But this was done for the sake of the Son, and written down for us. We are more privileged than those who were at the Jordan that day, because we know what was going on, and what it meant.

What happened? Jesus saw two things: the heavens being split open, and the Spirit of God coming upon him like a dove. He heard the Father say three things: You are My Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well-pleased.

Here is one of those astounding events where all three Persons of the Triune God are present. The Father is speaking. The Son is being baptised. The Spirit is descending and anointing. Here is clear evidence that God is not one Person with three faces or modes of existence, but three Persons, who know and love each other.

This Triune celebration is all about saying: You are authentic. You are not a wild fanatic from Nazareth with insane delusions about being the Son of God. You are not a liar, wickedly trying to get people to believe in you. You are the genuine, authentic, verified, true Son of God sent to be the Messiah of Israel.

Consider what the Father says to Jesus. He says firstly, "You are My Son". Many heresies arose in the early church, claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was a sinful man like all others, and it was here that God adopted Him, and said, "You are My Son." But the text does not say, "You are now My Son", it says, "You are My Son". God is stating the truth. The Father is saying to Jesus, on a far more majestic and eternal level, what we fathers say to our sons when we look at them and simply

say, “My boy”, “My son”. These are the words said in Psalm 2:7 to the Messiah – You are My Son. Jesus is not the Son because He is the Messiah. He is the Messiah because He is the Son.

And if there were any question that this is what God means, the word translated 'beloved' should put all doubts to rest. That word *beloved* is a predicate adjective meaning you could translate, 'You are My Son, the Beloved'. A powerfully intimate, deeply relational word. It means deeply loved, treasured, beloved. In fact, it takes on the shade of meaning that the words 'only begotten' have – one of a kind, unique, one and only.

Here the Father is asserting that the relationship He has with the Son is a unique, eternal, unmatched relationship of love. He has always loved the Son, and the Son has always loved the Father. Before the stars ignited, before galaxies shone, before the first drop of the sea existed, the Father, Son and Spirit loved each other.

Listen to the third thing the Father says, “in whom I am well-pleased”. The word means *delighted with*. In contrast to rebellious Israel, God's Servant-Son is delightful. Jesus said in John 8:29, I always do those things that please Him.

The only ones who hear this Divine statement of authenticity were Jesus, and you and I when we read the Scriptures. This is who you are trusting in. This is who you are looking to for forgiveness. This is the one who reconciles you to the Father. Why? He has unique access to the Father. He has a unique relationship with the Father because God is well-pleased with Him, delighted in Him, and all who turn from their sin, and hide themselves in Christ receive the same verdict on themselves – you are my child, in whom I am well-pleased.

But it wasn't only the Father that authenticated Jesus. The Holy Spirit did something, too. Verse 10 says that Jesus saw the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. What did this mean? When we go through the Old Testament we see something that the Holy Spirit does. When God rules over His people, the Holy Spirit would often come upon someone to empower them for great service. He came upon the craftsmen who had to design the items of the Tabernacle. He came upon Moses to lead Israel. He came upon Joshua. He came upon the judges - (Othniel, 3:10; Gideon, 6:34; Jephthah, 11:29; Samson, 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14). In the days of the first kings, we see this ministry. The Spirit descended upon Saul (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6) and turned a cowardly young man unable to keep track of his father's donkeys (1 Sam 9:3; 10:21,22) into a courageous warrior (1 Sam 14:47, 48; 11:1 15). When Saul turned from following God, this special anointing by the Spirit left him and came upon David. Later we hear of this ministry being given to prophets (2 Chr 15:1; Dan 4:8, 9, 18; 5:11, 14; Neh 9:30; Zech 7:12) and for priests and Levites (2 Chr 20:14; 24:20). Some theologians have called this the *theocratic anointing*. God rules over Israel as a theocracy, but He mediates that rule through men. And the men He chooses to use are anointed by the Spirit. Who would be the ultimate ruler of God's people? Who is the true prophet, priest and king? Messiah. So here, at His baptism, Jesus receives this theocratic anointing by the Spirit, this empowerment for great service to God. He was always filled by the Spirit, but here He receives the special unction which affirms – you are the Son. You are the Messiah.

His humble baptism by John becomes His exalted anointing by God.

So what do we have here? He is the Son. The Father gives Him unqualified approval. The Spirit rests upon Him for empowerment for His mission. What does this say? He is the One! He is authenticated.

If you doubt what men say, what about what God has said?

1 John 5:9 ⁹ *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son.*

People are fond of saying, regarding religious beliefs, “That’s just your interpretation! That’s just your opinion!” Well, here we have God’s interpretation of who Jesus is. Is it enough for us? Can we obtain more expert witnesses than God the Father and God the Spirit? On the expert testimony of the two greatest possible witnesses, Jesus is the Son. He is the Messiah. You can place your entire hope in Him. You can flee to Him, forsaking all others. You can throw the whole weight of your eternal destiny upon Him.

But there was a second test of authenticity that Jesus faced. It was also a test unseen by the public. Verses 12 through 13 teach us the second way Jesus was authenticated.

II. Jesus Was Authenticated by the Tempter’s Tests

¹² *Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.* ¹³ *And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.*

Right after this rapturous experience of His Father’s and the Spirit’s affirmation, He is driven out to an experience opposite in character. How often mountaintop experiences are followed by lonely battles.

Notice who it was that led him to the wilderness. Satan did not entice and then trap Jesus. Jesus did not happen upon this place by chance. “The Spirit drove Him...” Rather, it was God’s planned means to further verify and certify that Jesus was indeed the God-Man and Messiah. The Father took the Son from the mountaintop of anointing straight to the battlefield of open conflict with Satan in order to establish Jesus’ identity and power.

This was the wilderness. A rocky, desert-type place, filled with dangerous animals. He was there for forty days, and it became the scene of open conflict. Here Satan would tempt Jesus. The word for *tempted* means to test, to try. The idea is, to put someone to the test to discover what kind of person he or she is. Here, at every possible disadvantage, in hunger, weakness, discomfort, loneliness and apparent danger, Satan will throw at Jesus his tailor-made temptations, temptations that will have the greatest possible force on Jesus.

Mark doesn’t go into them, but we know from Matthew and Luke that Satan taunted Jesus to prove that He was indeed the Son of God. Fresh from hearing the Father say it, and the Spirit show it, now sitting among the stones, feeling weak, hungry, lonely, Satan buffets him with doubts. You aren’t really the Son, are you?

And just like with Job, God is using Satan’s own sinfulness to test the character of His servant. It was not Satan that trapped Jesus; rather it was Satan who was forced into open combat with Christ. Not to see if He would sin, but to prove that He could not sin. It’s all very well to say Jesus is the Son when coming out of the warm water of the Jordan, but what about in the barren rocky and gritty realities of life on a fallen planet?

There are two historical scenes which seem to be replayed here: Israel in the wilderness, and Adam in the Garden. Israel, we remember was in the wilderness for forty years. When hungry, what did they do? They committed unbelief, and complained. When thirsty, what did they do? They tempted the Lord with their murmuring about water. When confronted with a golden calf, what did they do?

They bowed down. Jesus however chose not to turn stones into bread, knowing God's Word is true sustenance. Jesus chose not to tempt God in throwing Himself off the Temple. And He chose not to worship idols by refusing to bow down to Satan. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded. He is qualified to be the King of Israel, and the King of a New Covenant people. Who led Israel out of the wilderness and into the Promised land? Joshua. What does Jesus mean? Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Yeshua – Joshua.

Adam had been a garden with every possible advantage: food, companionship, his every need met. He was tempted by the appetite – lust of the flesh, He was tempted by the appearance of the fruit – lust of the eyes, and he was tempted by the possibility of being made as wise as God – the pride of life. He refused to trust God's words, fell into sin, and the whole race with him. Jesus, being the most serious disadvantage, was also tempted by the lust of the flesh – the bread, the lust of the eyes – the glory of the all the kingdoms Satan offered him, and the pride of life – jumping off the Temple and having the angels catch him to the amazement and applause of all. But Jesus responded to each of those temptations with God's Word. He remained devoted to God, and emerged victorious. Jesus is the Second Adam who heads up a new race born again by God.

Do you see that Jesus faced the full onslaught of temptation and emerged victorious? He could not sin, but He could be tempted. In His human nature, He could feel the full force, the sometimes seemingly irresistible allure of sin. But what did He do? In the power of the Spirit, in reliance upon the Word, in submission to His Father, He overcame sin.

What does this say about Jesus' authenticity as Saviour, as Messiah? For us to have someone who can truly stand in our place, be our substitute for our sins, He must be truly human. But in order to take our sin, He must be sinless. Jesus faced sin head-on, and overcame it. The One we long for, the One humans heart hope for, is someone who will be both sinless and able to take away our sin, while being understanding about the great struggle with it, and merciful. You can trust Him to bear your sin as a holy sacrifice, and you can trust that He will be sympathetic to you in yours. To be saved we need a uniquely human, and yet divine Saviour: a Man who can be untouched by sin, and yet sympathetic to you in yours. Our Creator among us, and yet one of us. If the baptism proved He is God the Son, then the temptation verified it and added – He is the true, and perfect, Son of Man.

The writer of Hebrews exults in this fact, and calls on us to cleave to Him, run to Him, trust in Him.

Hebrews 2:14-18 ⁴ *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*

Hebrews 4:14 - 5:1 *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Behold our Captain, leading from the front! He is not a general hidden in a tent far from the sound of gunfire. He led the charge, initiating battle with Satan. He took on the hardship of a wilderness fast of loneliness, so that apart from human support, it could be seen who won the contest. Jesus wrestled from Satan's own hands his weapons – temptation and fear of death. No other human has come away from this conflict victorious, but Jesus did.

No human eye saw this, but Jesus did, and told His disciples of it, and they recorded it. Here we have the Spirit's certifying of who Jesus is. Is He a qualified High Priest? Is He the genuine Saviour from sin? Does He have the credentials to die for sin, rescue you from sin, and mercifully love you and bear with you?

So, I ask you what Jesus asked His disciples, What say ye of Christ? Whom do you say He is? A good man? A wise prophet? A flawed, but essentially good teacher? A great rabbi? A moral genius? A kind philosopher?

These verses in Mark say something else. Two stamps of approval, one from God, and the other, ironically provided by Satan. He is God's own beloved Son, He is the sinless, victorious Son of Man, who is our High Priest.

He is the One. There is no other. No one has done what Jesus did, nor will there be another. The Trinity has testified to it. The tempter's tests have testified to it. So trust Him, Christian. Look to Him, if you never have.