



Matthew 3.¹⁵ (fourth in "jesus' first words" series)¹

Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.
Tolerate it for now, because this is how we appropriately accomplish all that is right (author's translation)

In our first three meditation in this series entitled, "Jesus' First Words," we explored John 1.³⁸. We consider the nature and multiplicity of human desire, and Jesus' interest in knowing and responding to appropriate human desire. We also considered the highest of human desire, to understand Jesus and his true nature.

In this meditation, we consider Jesus' first utterance as recorded by Matthew, and what it tells us about him. Jesus spoke these words to John the Baptist when the Baptist expressed reluctance to baptize Jesus.

We first note the plural. Jesus does not say, "this is how *I* appropriately accomplish all that is right." This is how we often think of Jesus' statement. As if Jesus were using the royal "we," we understand Jesus to be speaking of his own private need to be baptized in order to be right with God in all matters. But there is no reason to assume a royal "we" here. Rather, in Jesus' "we," Jesus intends to include the Baptist: "this is how you and I accomplish all that is right." However John's baptism of Jesus accomplishes "all that is right," John's baptism of Jesus allows both John and Jesus to be right with God.

This suggests at least two things about Jesus. First, Jesus intends to do everything right, to act in ways that are right with God and so please Him. During one particularly testy confrontation with religious leaders, they complained to Jesus, "Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true."² Jesus replied by assuring them that in addition to his own witness, "the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."³ Jesus then declared,

"I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for *I do always those things that please him.*"⁴

In so saying, Jesus is not being boastful. He is providing them a sign that God has sent him and that he does God's will. Indeed, upon being baptized and demonstrating his intent to do all that is right, there was heard "a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"⁵

Jesus' baptism was a sign of God's pleasure with Jesus. In being baptized a sign was given of this pleasure. Jesus' priority was always to do God's will and so please him.

¹ In addition to this passage, this series explores Mark 1.¹⁵, and Luke 2.¹⁵, and John 1.³⁸.

² John 8.¹³

³ John 8.¹⁸

⁴ John 8.²⁸⁻²⁹

⁵ Matthew 3.¹⁷

But there is a second thing to be learned from Jesus' statement to the Baptist. Jesus' intentions to "do always those things that please" God was not only not boastful, it was not selfish. With Jesus' "we," he reveals his inclusiveness. When John baptized Jesus, it was not only Jesus with whom God would be pleased, but John as well. It was always Jesus' intention to bring others along with him in doing all that is right. He would set an example, show the way, and invite others to join him in his life work of doing what is right and pleasing God.

Jesus' first words as recorded by Matthew, then, not only remind us of Jesus' intention and commitment to always do the right thing, but of his intention to bring others along with him. It was not then or now enough for Jesus that he please God. He wished and wishes all to find God's pleasure. Jesus' work was and is one focused on "we," rather than "I."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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