

Why Jesus Matters

Matthew 3:13-17

Dr. Sandy Willson

Thank you. And I get a warm welcome every time I come here. And I have a feeling that every one of you do. I've told you before I feel like I'm with my family when I'm here. Thank you for the warmth and the affection that you share with one another and with guests like me.

It's a privilege to assist a Dr. Doriani in any way that we can. Randy Pope and I are very glad to kind of be subs every once in a while and to help out in all that we can. We're praying for Briarwood during this most important season. Sometimes the interim periods people look at them as times to kind of wait for the next thing to happen. No, no, no. Interim periods are very strategic periods when you and the leaders in the church are thinking about the things you really want to address during this important season and I can't think of anybody better than Dr. Dorian to lead us all through it.

Well, it's a privilege to be preaching this morning, and I've sought to align my sermons with those of Dr. Doriani. He's going to be leading you through a study of Matthew, not word for word. You won't be looking at every single text, but you'll be making your way through Matthew, and he's going to begin with the Temptation of Christ next week, which I think is an enormously significant and important text, because we face so many temptations and the church is being ravaged by the temptations presented to us and our weakness in resisting them. So I'm looking forward to you're hearing that message next week.

I thought today we'd back up and go to Matthew 3, the previous chapter, and look at the real beginning of Jesus' public ministry. This, you realize, is his first adult appearance in public at 30 years of age. He's at his baptism and the church at large has ceased to emphasize the baptism like Peter did when he was preaching in Cornelius' household in Acts 10 he mentioned the baptism is one of the important things about who Christ is and what He does for us. As I hope we see this morning as we study it, there's another reason for us to do so in Presbyterian churches Some of us remember these things. Sometimes we don't. But Christmas tide begins with Christmas Day and goes through January the sixth, which is Epiphany Day. So those are the 12 days of Christmas that we sing about. It's called Christmas tide. And then January 6th is Epiphany Day in the Eastern Church, the Incarnation version of Jesus that we celebrate on Christmas is actually celebrated on January 6 - Epiphany Day. Epiphany means a manifestation or a revelation. So, when there's an epiphany -- that means God shows up. He's revealing something about himself. He's manifesting himself to us. In the Western church on Epiphany Day, we often remember the Magi coming to the birthplace of Jesus and offering their gifts as to a King. So Jesus is revealed to us. There's an epiphany. He's revealed to us as a King and the star that led the Magi. There is an epiphany of God's direction. Well, also in the Western Church on Epiphany day and Epiphany Sunday, which is today, we read the text that we're going to read. It's about the baptism of Jesus, because it also is an epiphany. It's a revelation of who Jesus is and what he means to us and what he ought to mean to everyone. And so, it's very appropriate that we look at this text today. It's not often preached on, but it's extremely important for us, as I hope you see, as I have in studying it these past days.

Please turn to Matthew 3:13-17. Would you stand with me, and we'll join together in prayer and then we'll read the text together. Let us pray.

Father, we thank you for this enormous privilege that we have of gathering freely to worship you, which we've been doing. Thank you for the loveliness of your love for us and the gospel which we've been singing about. We've been taking it in and we've been giving it back to you and praise to thank you for saving us and making us your people. Lord, we come together knowing we need to hear your voice. And that's the reason we've come to this part of the service to hear your voice in the Scriptures. Please help my brothers and sisters and all of our guests to hear you speaking and not a sinful preacher like myself. May your word dwell richly in our hearts as we pray speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Hear the Word of God.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by Him. John would have prevented him saying, I need to be baptized by you and you come to me. But Jesus answered him, let it be so now for thus, it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water and behold the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him. And behold, a voice from heaven said, This is my beloved son. With him, I'm well pleased.

All flesh is like grass and all its glory is like the flower of the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of our God stands forever. Amen. Please be seated.

Well, I tried out little experiment this week. I have a little app on my iPad, and I admit I don't use it very often. But it is the app and I've forgotten even the name of it that connects you to artificial intelligence. And I looked at my sermon title ***Why Jesus Matters***, and I thought I would just ask A.I. why Jesus matters now. Before I did that, I asked some other questions just to see if A.I. was on its game.

I asked, what is the square root of 48,000,973 682? And it gave me a precise answer about the square root. And then I asked, why is the sky blue? I'd never had anybody explain to me why the sky was blue, but it gave me a reasonable scientific explanation for why the sky is blue. Then I asked, why is the grass green? And once again, I got a marvelous explanation for how the light rays in the prism of wavelengths and light, how it's reflected and why plants often reflect the green. It was really quite impressive. I thought, well, this really is artificial intelligence. And then I asked the question, why does Jesus matter? A.I. didn't have a very good answer. The answer went something like this. He's a major figure, a symbol of love and forgiveness. And then I asked why do people need Jesus? What would the world be like without Jesus? A.I. told me, well, Jesus has had a lot of influence on culture through the centuries and has influenced many people through his teaching in ethics. And once again, I was disappointed. And I began to think, you know, A.I. stands for artificial intelligence. Maybe it also stands for artificial ignorance when it comes to things of the Spirit. Because let me tell you, your computer does not have a soul. It takes a soul to understand facts about life, even about history, about the meaning of the universe. It takes a soul to deal with those scientific realities and artificial intelligence and some of the actual intelligence of those around us can't always bring it to us.

John the Baptist was sure to show us why Jesus matters, and here's how he did it. The times in which Jesus came to the Earth were difficult times. It was a very poor land. Israel was under oppression by the Romans, as you know. It was also very corrupt. The people had lost their way, and their leaders were corrupt. Their Bible teachers were hypocritical. They told other people to do things that they didn't do themselves and it was a great offense. The clergy were tied in with the Sadducees who were tied in with

the Roman government and all its secularizing and paganizing influences. So, the pastors, if you will, the spiritual leaders in the Bible, teachers were all corrupt, not to be trusted. It was a difficult time, and it reminds me really of our times now. When we look around the world, we see Israel and Hamas at war. We see Ukraine and Russia at war. We see bad people doing bad things. We look at our own nation and see that over the past year of 2023, we had nearly 700 mass shootings. That's two a day mass shootings in our country. We find people polarized culturally, politically and religiously. We find the church over the past 25 years, having lost 40 million people in America, the greatest the dechurching movement in the history of the United States. Biblical illiteracy is exponentially increasing. Pastors are discouraged. It's a corrupt era.

Now, John the Baptist was born into a priestly family. Priestly families typically minister in the temple. You'll notice that what John does with his ministry - he goes away from the temple. He's very intentional about it. It's going to be non-institutional because the institution of the church is corrupt. So, John goes out into the wilderness. He goes down from the mountain where Jerusalem is, goes down toward Jericho, down in that low territory near the Dead Sea, but still at the Jordan River. And there he's preaching to people and he's unloading on them for two reasons. Number one, they're corrupt. Number two, the kingdom of God is on its way. It's right on the edge of the dawn of God's kingdom, and they're in trouble. And his basic message to them is, let me tell you what you've been doing. And I can imagine what he would do in our day.

He'd probably gather us all out there by the river and he would say, look, you care more about your football team, your political party, than you care about the kingdom. You've been spending money on yourself hand over fist. You're the wealthiest country in the history of the world, and you still have all these poor people and you've got people leaving the church. And there's a reason -- we fail to evangelize. And he would go on and on and then he would hit the leaders as he as John did the Pharisees and Sadducees. Some of those clergy came out because they want to participate. Hey, revival is going on. I'm going to see what it is. They go out there to get baptized. You know what John does? Calls them a bunch of snakes. He said, Who told you to flee from the rest to come? So he called them all out because John knows something's got to give. And here is his solution. You need to repent. So, the doctrine of repentance is begun here in a strong way in the New Testament with John the Baptist. But it's an Old Testament principle. It's the Hebrew word 'shuv.' And John just picks up on this idea that you've got to change, you've got to turn. Here's the problem. You can't do it. I don't know how much of this John actually understood. I know he understood something of it because he's anticipating the Messiah who's to come. I don't know that John completely understood how hopeless his message was, apart from the appearance of that Messiah. But it is!

If I tell you to change on December 31, I want you to make some New Year's resolutions. Well, I know over half of you by today have failed in your New Year's resolutions. Why? Because you're a fallen human being, just like me. I proved it last night with that big bowl of ice cream with chocolate sauce on it. That was January the sixth. Well, so much for that resolution. And that's the way we are. And you look at the history of Israel and that's the way we are. God miraculously, dramatically, gloriously delivers us from slavery under the Egyptians. And within weeks, what are we doing? We're complaining bitterly about the lack of provision. We don't trust him. What do we do? Months later, we get to the base of Mount Sinai and we create another god, a golden calf that we could worship. And what else do we do? Well, we send spies in to spy the promised land that God told us he would give us. And when the spies come back and give us the report. We tell God this isn't going to work. We know your God, but it's not going to work. It's

impossible. And so we spend 40 more years in the wilderness. And then when we finally do get to the promised land, what do we do? We start imitating the Philistines and we let them terrorize us. And then what do we do when we have the kingship? Well, you know, from Solomon, the wisest man in the Old Testament, by the end of his life, he's bound down before pagan gods. Then if we go on with our history, we get to the sixth century, and finally we're taken into exile, into Babylon. That's after the Northern Kingdom had been taken into Babylon, to the Assyrians because of our disobedience. God graciously brings us back. Then what happens? Well, you know, from the appearance and the preaching of Malachi and Zachariah, Nehemiah, Ezra, the people just abandoned all moral standards, God had brought them back and rebuilt the temple and they just abandoned his word. And then they're oppressed by the Persians and then by the Greeks and now the Romans. It's just a cyclic story of hopeless efforts at repentance. That's when Jesus showed up.

I want us to know a couple of things about Jesus and why he matters to us. Because no matter what our national problems are, or our evangelical church problems are, or even our local church problems, you can't solve them without the Lord Jesus Christ. He matters.

I want you to notice, first of all, if you look at these first three verses 13, 14 and 15, there's because Jesus is determined to save his people. I notice in verse 13, we picked this up when we are shown that Jesus himself takes the initiative, Jesus takes the initiative, He still is. You know why? If you're a believer this morning, why you're a believer, yes, indeed. Your football coach may have led you to Christ or your eighth grade teacher or maybe someone in youth group, or maybe was your parents who led you to Christ. But let me tell you ultimately what the Bible teaches us, that Jesus was behind every one of those acts. He was the one taking the initiative with you. The reason I say that if you look at verse 13, it says, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John. It doesn't say John went up and solicited Jesus to please make the journey because he needed some help. John didn't even ask for help. Nor does it say that these poor people who are trying to repent hopelessly said, This isn't going to work. We need a savior. No one asked Jesus. They didn't even know better. But notice that Jesus had them on his heart. He makes the trip. And let me tell you, that was not an easy trip. Israel is a small country, but if you do it by foot, it feels like a really big country. It's 70 miles from Nazareth to where John was baptizing. That's like walking the Gadsden. So you're not going to do that lightly. Jesus was obviously on a mission. He was going to wear John the Baptist. Preaching repentance was baptizing people in a baptism of repentance for a very intentional purpose as we will see, he was going to be baptized himself, which is a remarkable mystery. We'll talk about it.

Jesus being baptized. Well, what did this mean to him? Well, we're still trying to figure it out. Scholars are still scratching their heads, trying to figure out what in the world did this mean? Well, I'll tell you one thing it meant -- when Jesus was talking to his disciples shortly before he was crucified, he said to them, I have a baptism to go through. Jesus knew quite well that what you needed and what I need. If we are to deal with a corrupt world and a corrupt heart, and if we want to repent and change, we're going to have to have divine help. We cannot do it on our own. And Jesus knew the way to do that was through baptism himself. And the reason your baptism makes a difference is because his baptism was shedding his blood. And that's the reason that when we have baptisms, the pastor will often say, this water represents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It also represents the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what cleanses. That's what reunites us to God, the Father. And every step along the way of those 70 miles, the Lord Jesus was thinking, I've come not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me. He

was intentional in what he was doing. He showed up at a sinners gathering under the preaching of John the Baptist to repent. So, he takes the initiative.

Secondly, I want you to notice in verse 14 that Jesus massively humbles himself. The reason I say that is you see in the verse there, John would have prevented him. So would you. If the perfect son of God comes and I'm preaching repentance of those who want to repent, the baptized come forward and here comes Jesus. No way I'm submitting myself to your baptism. You're cleansing. It's exactly the way John felt. It's the way that Peter felt when Jesus was going to wash his feet. Peter said, there's no way you're going to wash my feet. That Jesus said, Well, you have no part to me. And he said, wash all of me. It doesn't make sense that Jesus would submit to a sinner's baptism, a washing for sinners who want to repent. And that was the meaning of John's baptism.

Now, you know, the Qumran community was a community that existed during Jesus day down near this area. You can go visit it today and you'll see they have little mikvah baths, because in the Qumran community, they were separatists. They pulled away from society and they built their own community and they had a ritual of bathing every day in the mikvah baths as ritual cleansing. So there was continual cleansing. So, this is not a Qumran baptism. It's different. It's a once in done baptism of repentance.

Likewise, some people say, Well, it must be like a proselyte baptism. Here's where it differs. A proselyte baptism was largely for Gentiles who wanted to become believing Jewish people. The men were to be circumcised and everybody was baptized. A proselyte, a gentile baptism to come in to the Israelite community. That was for Gentiles. Ladies and gentlemen, this is for Jews. two people who had already received all the marks that made them God's people. And what does John the Baptist say to them? He says, God can raise up children from Abraham, from the stones out here. Don't you go claiming to me I'm a child of Abraham. I've been baptized, sanitized, circumcised. I'm in. No, I means nothing in terms of your ultimate relationship with God. So the baptism was for insiders who were sinning and who had abandoned God. And Jesus said, I will be baptized. So, one scholar has said this was Jesus' first miracle. It was the miracle of humility. Benny said to us at the very beginning of this service that he struggles with humility. We and we all resonate with what he was saying. It's not just men who don't like directions. It's men and women who have multiple ways to express our pride. The biggest problem in churches is pride. The thing that divides churches is pride. Every church I've consulted with in the last four or five years, everything can be traced back to pride. It's very divisive. It's very destructive. And we all have it. And Jesus shows us here how salvation happens through humility and is self-denial, that the kingdom of God goes forward and the work of Christ is done. It's always through self-denial and through humility. And humility always leads to sacrificial service toward other people. Always, as you see it here, Jesus humbles himself. And that's the reason that just a few pages later in Matthew's gospel, we can hear him saying, Come on to me, all you are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. For I'm humble and gentle in heart and you will find rest for your soul. John the Baptist had an important message.

Jesus had a more important message. Yes. The judgment is coming. Yes, we must be aware of it. We must be prepared for it. But there's a season and we're in that season now. When Jesus said, I'm dealing with you gently and pleading with you and drawing near to you that you may know God and be saved from your sin and have repentance, that makes a difference.

Jesus humbled himself. You know, this whole baptism was a sort of an inauguration for Jesus because he's a king. It was sort of an ordination, if you will, because he was a shepherd and a pastor. It was an

installation. He was a prophet, priest and a king. And I just remember back in 2023, on May the sixth, when King Charles was coronated. All the gilded chariots, the 700 year old priceless throne upon which he sat, emissaries and kings and queens and princes, the nobility from all over the world coming to London and to the very place of the coronation, Westminster Abbey. And we learned that that little service cost \$125 million dollars. Charles is dust compared to Jesus Christ. What shall we do when we coronate him? Look at the humility of this little service in the Jordan River. Jesus humble himself for your salvation and mine.

And then thirdly, notice not only that he takes the initiative and he does it with humility, but Jesus fulfills all righteousness. If you look at verse 15, when Jesus argues with John and explains to Him why he has to undergo this baptism, he says, No, it's good for now to fulfill all righteousness.

Now you have to know that in Matthew's gospel in particular, the word righteousness is a very important word. He says, for example, in the Beatitudes, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. He goes on to say in the Beatitudes, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Continuing in the Sermon on the Mount, he says later on in 5:20 that unless your righteousness and he's talking about practical righteousness, not the imputed righteousness that we celebrated and spoke of a from the Creed this morning, he's talking about your real practical lifestyle, the way you're conducting yourself, your thoughts, your words, your deeds, your practical righteousness, he says unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never inherit the kingdom of heaven. Really? Yes, because they were hypocritical and real righteousness begins in the heart with love for the righteous one himself. So our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees. That's what a Christian is. And then later on in that same sermon, (6:33) Jesus says, Seek first the Kingdom, His kingdom and His righteousness.

So, Matthew stresses this. Matthew also stresses the idea of fulfillment. You'll remember that Matthew begins his gospel with this long genealogy. Matthew wants to show where Jesus came from in terms of human ancestry, that he really is the son of David. He really did descend from Abraham. So Matthew shows that clearly, because his audience is largely Jewish and the reason we know this is that from the very beginning of Matthew's gospel, you'll remember he cites Old Testament verses and shows how they are fulfilled in Jesus. He does that 54 times in his gospel. He cites Old Testament references to say what you read in the Torah is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Messiah for whom we've been waiting, he says to His Jewish audience. And over 250 times scholars tell us there are allusions and parallels to Old Testament references. So the idea of fulfillment is strong here.

And here's what Jesus is saying. John, you must baptize me. The reason is, I am going to identify with all of these sinners. I'm going to become one of them. I'm going to take their burdens upon myself. And when I'm washed, they'll be washed. John, you don't understand it now, but this fulfills all righteousness because righteousness from God's perspective is his will, His decree, his order. And he has ordered that his people be saved, and he has ordered that his will be done through his own son incarnate. And he has ordered that he bear their sins and they'd be washed away in his life and his sacrifice -- without saying all that, that is what Jesus is saying. I've come to do my father's will. And ladies and gentlemen, when you get to know a Christian woman or a Christian man or a Christian student who is an effective faithful leader for the sake of Jesus Christ, you find the same instinct. I've come not to please myself. I'm not come to serve myself. I've come to sacrifice myself for the sake of the glory of God. That comes straight from Jesus Christ. You see it in the Apostle Paul's life. You see it in all the Christian leaders through 2000

years. This has been their attitude. It comes from Jesus. Jesus was absolutely determined. He took the initiative. He humbled himself to accomplish it. And his goal was to fulfill nothing less than the righteousness of God himself.

Now notice, secondly, something that is actually even more important, although we'll spend less time on it, and that is that in the latter two versus, I want you to see that Jesus alone is not only determined he's qualified to save his people. And I want you to know as briefly in these verses why this is so. It's one thing to have someone determined to help you, but if they don't have the ability to help you, it doesn't help you very much. You appreciate the gesture, you appreciate the motives, the intent. But it doesn't do you any good. It only does your good when the person is qualified to do what they're determined to do.

And the reason Jesus matters is not only does he have the heart and the determination to save you, he's actually got the qualifications. And I want you to see that in three ways. Number one, we're told in verse 16 that the heavens were opened. What does this remind you of? Well, if you've read Ezekiel lately before, Ezekiel has his grand vision, we're told that the heaven was open to him. He can see into heaven. Furthermore, in the writings of Isaiah, you get the same sort of language. When Isaiah is pleading with God to revive his people to bring us life in Isaiah 64:, he says, All that you would rend the heavens and come down. That the mountains might quake at your presence.

That is the prayer that for a revival, rend the heavens and come down, bring heaven to earth. That's what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer. We pray that his kingdom would come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Bring the obedience of the angels down here. That's what we're praying for. That's what happened when Jesus was baptized.

Heaven opened up. It is to be an epiphany. God is going to manifest himself and show us the most important thing in life. Secondly, you'll notice in verse 16, the spirit anoints him in Ezekiel 36. Of course, we're promised that the Spirit would come during the new the New Age, the age of the Messiah. And has he ever And as a matter of fact, this is not quite an exact quotation, but it's a very close allusion to another text in Isaiah. Isaiah 42:1, *Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen and whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations.* God had promised that when his suffering servant comes, who will fulfill Isaiah 53, laying down his life for us and shed his blood for us. He will be anointed with the spirit.

Now, kings and prophets and priests in the Old Testament were anointed at their ordination with oil, and the oil represents the spirit. But when God's son comes, you won't need the oil because the Spirit himself will come and anointed. And that's exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was anointed. And then thirdly, notice in verse 17, not only are the heavens opened and the spirit anoints him, but God speaks from on high with heaven opened to us.

Now, folks, this only happened twice in the Gospels. Normally we get the Word of God from Christ Himself or from the Apostles. In two instances, you get it straight from the Father at the baptism in the transfiguration, and you're saying the same thing so that everybody hears it. Ladies and gentlemen, this is my son. I am well pleased with him. He is my beloved. What God the Father is announcing to the entire universe is that this is it. Here he is. This is what we've been waiting for. Here is my beloved son.

Jesus has the mark of God on him in every way. He is credentialed from on high. He is saying to the universe, you would be foolish not to listen to him and obey him. He is God's appointed servant and Messiah and King.

Now, you still may be asking yourselves this morning, why does Jesus matter? I'm delighted to see that he's exalted, that he has come to save and he's able to do it. But I just want to know what difference this makes for me. Well, here's what you get. Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his ministry, and he was ultimately baptized, of course, on the cross when he shed his blood.

That was his baptism to undergo. But you'll notice when you get to the end of Matthew's gospel, what does Jesus command His disciples to do? To make disciples and baptize them? Why? Because what Jesus experienced and what he did is happening to those who are baptized spiritually into Jesus Christ. They're to be baptized to benefit from his baptism.

So, for example, ladies and gentlemen, if you give your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, you're baptized into Him. The heavens are open for you. Don't take this lightly. We're told that the High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, went through the heavens and opened the canopies of Heaven to us so that we have direct access to the throne of God - intimately. We've been reconciled to God. We can enter His holy place because of the baptism of Jesus Christ. We're now baptized into His presence. We can speak to him as our father. Papa - Abba. You can talk to him intimately. You say, I don't know how to pray. Just talk to him. He's your father. This amazing thing. What Jesus has done for us. Opening the heavens for us. Not only do we have access to pray. If you read the Book of Revelation recently, you now see the picture. Because, as John says, when he takes us into the throne, surrounded by 24 elders and all these creatures, he says, the door of heaven was opened to me. I can see it. I know who's reigning on his throne. I know who's sovereignly controlling my life. I know who's got history in his hands. I know who he loves. And that's. The heavens have been opened to you. You see the future, the bearers of the present. Secondly, the spirit has been promised to you and given to you. When you became a Christian you needn't be anointed with oil. You're anointed with the Spirit of God. Jesus in the high upper room said to his disciples, Look, you may miss me, but let me tell you something. I'm going so that I may send the comforter to you. You're going to be better off and walking alongside me because I'm going to be inside of you. I'm going to live in you like a hand in a glove. We're doing this together. I'm in you and you're in me. Just as the father is in me. And I'm in. The father draws you into the Trinitarian community by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is the reason that Jesus said you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses and you will repent, because God will enable you sincerely to repent over and over again because of the power of the spirit.

And if you look in the Book of Acts, you'll find that every leading character, starting with Jesus, it is said of them, they were anointed with a spirit, and so are we. We trust them in our imperfect lives - our failing lives to continue with us. We've been baptized in the spirit. Thirdly, notice that there's a voice to you to God, the father said to his son. This is my beloved son, with whom I'm well pleased. Do you hear what he says to you. Well done, thou good and faithful servant. He's pleased with you. How much damage has been done in this world and in many pews in this church this morning by parents who made you think you're never enough? Who made you think they were never satisfied with your accomplishments? How many people have gone nearly crazy trying to gain approval that they never felt they had in life? Let me tell you what the gospel does for you. It completely breaks the bondage to your desire for approval from anybody else because you've got approval from the only one who matters. And

the reason is you're in Jesus. And as John Haines said just a few moments ago, he loves you like he loves Jesus because you're in Jesus and Jesus is in you.

What difference does Jesus make? Well, artificial ignorance doesn't always come up with the answer, but God's people do. He means everything and nothing is worth anything without him and everything, including our pains and sorrows, are meaningful, deeply meaningful because of it. Glory be to His Name. Amen. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the baptism of our Savior. A humbled, a humbling baptism for all of us to observe. For he was the only one who did not need to repent. But we are doubly humbled because he took on our sins and sorrows and experienced the pain of crucifixion to wash them away. And we've been saved. Father, if there be any here who don't yet know you savingly, we pray today that they would see from John the Baptist teaching and preaching how much they need a savior.

And we pray that by observing the kindness and humility and power of Jesus Christ, they would receive the savior who's been given us. We pray for this year no matter what our struggles are, no matter what our challenges are, no matter what our opportunities are that we may find ourselves casting ourselves completely upon your mercy and trusting you in every way.

And we, like Isaac Watts. Well, cry out, Lord, give us a thousand times to sing your praise for you are indeed worthy of all our adoration, all of our exaltation and all of our praise. This we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.