

“Standing Together in Jordan”

(Holy Consent)

Isaiah 42:1

Matthew 3:13-17

Scripture Lesson from the OT: “Behold My Servant whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights, I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.”

Scripture Lesson from the NT: “Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan River coming to John to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You and You come to me? But Jesus answered and said unto him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” then he permitted Him. And after being baptized Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold the heavens were opened and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming upon Him, and behold a voice out of the heavens saying, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

This is the Word of the Lord for the people of God.

There is a story about a teenage boy who came home from school one day and told his father about his day. It had been a difficult day for him, one on which he had been bullied and ridiculed about his choosing to be-friend another boy of a different race and religion. His father listened as he told his story and when he finished, his father asked him what he did about it. The boy responded by saying, “I just dealt with it.” When his father pressed him for an explanation of what he meant by his answer, he repeated himself by saying, “I just dealt with it Dad, by letting it be what it is, and leaving it at that.”

“I just dealt with it.” There is courageous wisdom in these words that may be applied to the challenges that will confront us in life no matter whether we are a teenage boy or a senior citizen. They remind us that whether we are seventeen or seventy-seven, we all will have life situations that need to be accepted at face value for what they are without further concern for the consequence.

John Lennon once wrote in a children’s song that “Life is what happens to you when you’re busy making other plans.”

Have you ever had a day when life happened to you while you were busy making other plans?

Have you ever had circumstances arise out of nowhere that you wanted to shout “No” to at the top of your lungs, circumstances that you didn’t create and did not want to deal with under any conditions?

Well, I’d wager we all have a few stories we could tell about those days. In fact, I’d wager there is not a one of us here today who couldn’t tell a story or three about them because your mama told you, like my mama told me, “There’ll be days like this.”

It seems that John the Baptist was having one of “those days” the day that Jesus showed up on John’s River out in the wilderness of Judea.

In Matthew 3:13 we read, “Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan River coming to John to be baptized by him.”

Jesus has come down to the river to pay John a visit. And it wasn’t a visit to exchange the pleasantries about the fine weather they were having. Jesus came to John’s River for a purpose. Jesus came to John’s River to be baptized by him.

You can see clearly from his response in the text that this was not something John expected would ever happen under any circumstances. John even tried to put a stop to it by initially rejecting Jesus’ request. He said, “I have need to be baptized by You, and You come to me?”

You see folks, John has confronted a problem that he’s going to have to “deal with” and because life is not going the way he had planned for it to go, he is rejecting it. Baptizing Jesus does not fit John’s image of who John is and who Jesus is, and he’s not liking this new image he is seeing.

It kind of makes me wonder, whatever happened to the “He must increase, and I must decrease?” (John 3:30) and what about the “one who is coming after me being mightier than I” (Matthew 3:11). And what about the “axe” (Matthew 3:10) and “the winnowing fork and the unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12)? The order of John’s world has been turned upside down here. John’s game plan for his ministry is not going the way he expected, and he is not happy at all!

In John’s view...

Jesus is the one who is supposed to increase, not John!

In John's view...

Jesus is the one who is more powerful and mightier, not John!

In John's view...

Jesus is the one who is the axe and the winnowing fork and the unquenchable fire, not John!

In John's view...

Jesus is the star of the show, not John!

Everything that is happening at this moment goes against the grain of John's thinking about how things are supposed to be. John knows what he wants to happen when Jesus comes and what he expects will happen when Jesus comes- but now that Jesus has come, everything he expected to happen is not happening the way he expected, and the only thing he can do is "just deal with it!"

So, what do we do when things in our life don't go the way we think they should, and our prayers are not answered how we want them to be answered?

What do we do when the bills are not paid, and the bank account is in the red?

What do we do when a relationship ends, or an illness comes, and our world is turned upside down?

What do we do when life presents challenges to us that are beyond our ability to meet its demands and make us want to just scream "No" at the top of our lungs?

And worse yet, what do we do when we know that "The One who is more powerful" than we are, "The One" in whom we have placed all our trust has not answered our prayers as we hoped they would be answered?

Well friends, Matthew's gospel sets two choices before us as to what we can do. We can do what John did and say "no" and resist the challenge or we can say "yes" to the challenge as being a part of God's will for us as Jesus did by "permitting it at this time to fulfill all righteousness."

“Let it be so now.” That’s what Jesus said to John. “I know that what’s before you is not what you were expecting, not what you had planned, but arguing and complaining about it will only be shaking your fist at God, and there is no sense in doing that. The best thing to do, the only thing to do, the only thing you can do is just “deal with it as it is and then leave it there!” This was the way forward for John, and in vs. 15 we read, “Then he (John) permitted Him” (Jesus).

In Jeremiah 29:11 it is written, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for good and not for disaster to give you a future and a hope.”

This raises some questions here for you to ponder now.

What if Jesus’ way of letting things be for now is to be our way too?

What if Jesus is telling us that the plans we had made cannot be fulfilled as we hoped they would, and we must “deal with it as it is by permitting it to be so for now?”

What if God is asking us to consent to certain circumstances of life that we don’t like and did not wish for?

It’s always easy for us to affirm Jesus’ mission as long we don’t have to change anything in our lives. But what happens when the affirmation of His mission requires a change in the way we are living or by our acceptance of an idea or proposition that is in opposition to our plan.

Saying “Yes” to Jesus then means that we “permit” Him to do what He says is needed at the time by trusting that whatever He requires of us, no matter how difficult, will better serve to fulfill God’s righteousness on earth and in heaven.

To give our consent to or permission for Jesus to have His way in our lives doesn’t mean we have to like our circumstances, or even want them to be as they are. It does mean however, that we must fully live into them by faith “permitting them in Christ for now.”

For us to “permit” or “consent” to His will for us means that we show up for life accepting our circumstances as they are, and be totally present every minute to what is happening as being God’s sovereign will for us without regard for how painful and difficult that may be. As most of you know, this will never be easy.

However, we cannot say that we have consented to the will of God for us until we relinquish our control over the end result, and have accepted the truth that we neither have all the answers, nor the need to have them. To consent or permit God's righteousness in this way requires an act of spiritual courage that will empower us to face the crisis before us with the peace of Christ in our hearts.

Consenting to the righteousness of God must never be misinterpreted to simply mean passive resignation to whatever happens as being God's omnipotent will.

Consenting by permission to fulfill God's righteousness is one of the boldest actions that a Christian will ever take because it requires a faith and love in the believer that will always be subject to the criticism and condemnation of others who have a lesser measure of these gifts and graces.

When we have resolved to make the decision to follow Jesus wherever He leads, we will then also understand the vital importance of remaining open and receptive to whatever results from our decision as being something required of us in the name of God for the fulfillment of all righteousness. Our response to God's missionary calling in this way must be a continual "yes" for the rest of our lives! This is God's answer to the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray.

This was how Jesus lived His life in relation to His heavenly Father. His life was a continual and eternal "yes" to His Father in heaven, to His disciples, and to you and me. He lived a full life of sacred permission and holy consent to the eternal needs and demands of God and humanity. Let us take a moment to consider what Jesus permitted in His life by saying, "yes" to his Father in heaven:

He said "yes" to bring good news to the poor.

He said "yes" to heal the sick and raise the dead.

He said "yes" to providing food and drink to the hungry and thirsty.

He said "yes" to celebrating the holy institution of marriage by turning water into wine.

He said "yes" in forgiving the sins of the woman caught in adultery.

He said "yes" to associating with sinners by permitting Mary to anoint him with expensive oils and kiss His feet.

He said, “yes” to speaking God’s truths against the power of human half-truths.

He said “yes” to the righteousness of God in The Garden of Gethsemane even when He knew the hour had come for His death on the cross.

He said “yes” to be God’s salvation for His people leaving His Father’s side in heaven to be born in a humble stable at Bethlehem.

Jesus was endowed by God with an indomitable spirit of courage and wisdom who never turned away or backed down from His Father’s righteousness by withholding consent to whatever was before Him that must be faced.

This was how He was able to live His life as God’s perfect son on earth. Thus, He permitted God’s will to be done in Him no matter what He would have to face as a result. And this was the reason He humbled Himself and stepped into the river of human life and was baptized in the same water as you and I.

For the Holy Son of God to consent to be baptized by a radical preacher on the edge of society in this way was a symbolic sacrificial act of “at-one-ment” with, and at the same time atonement for the sin and evil of the world (John 1:29).

When Jesus asked John to “permit it at this time,” He was asking John to not stand either above Him as His better, or below Him, as His servant, but rather to stand with Him in the pure water of life. When Jesus asks us to “permit it at this time,” He is asking us to do likewise, permitting all our sins to be washed away and made clean in the pure water of life.

Doesn’t that make you want to come down to the river this morning?

Doesn’t that make you want to stand in the water with Jesus?

Doesn’t that make you want to live your life everyday forever like that?

Doesn’t that make you want your life to be a continual “yes” to receiving God’s goodness and blessing despite your present circumstances?

Doesn’t that make you want your life to be a life of holy consent like Jesus lived, that fulfills all of God’s righteousness for you?

Doesn’t that make you want to be able to look back on your life when you stand before God some day and be able say that you “just dealt with it by letting it be all that it was and all it could be and leaving it at that?”

If you answered “yes”, then let me ask you a few more question here.

What do you need in your life or removed from your life now to “permit” yourself to fulfill God’s righteousness?

What would “holy consent” to the circumstances of life that you are facing today look like to you? Again, allow me to be more specific:

What would it mean for you to give “holy consent” to your relationship with your spouse?

What would it mean for you to give “holy consent” your son or daughter?

What would it mean for you to give “holy consent” to your pastor by hearing the word God for you?

What would it mean for you to give “holy consent” to another church member by praying with them and carrying a burden for them, truly being present with them in their suffering, not in judgment but in mercy and grace as God has been for you?

What would it mean for you to give “holy consent” to working out the salvation of yourself and another by healing a broken relationship?

What would it mean for you to give “holy consent” to permitting a fresh expression of ministry in your church by permitting a different vision of ministry?

The good news is that opportunities to permit God’s righteousness in our lives through holy consent are coming to us every day of the year.

Again, allow me to be more specific:

Maybe God is asking you to give “holy consent” to His righteousness by loving a fallen brother or sister little more, or perhaps by allowing yourself to be loved a little more so that you can forgive that brother or sister who has offended you. And then allow yourself to be forgiven by them too, so that you both might receive God’s salvation and be healed.

Maybe God is asking you to give “holy consent” to bringing new hope and growth in your church family through the relaxation of your incessant need to be in control of every program and ministry.

Maybe God is asking you to give “holy consent” through reaching out in mission to your community to share the material blessings God has given you by packing and delivering food boxes, or possibly opening a caring closet for recycled clothing or maybe starting a blanket ministry for the homeless.

Maybe God just wants you to give your “holy consent” to listen more to His “still small voice” than you do to the daily chit-chat of social media. As you can see, the opportunities for us to give “holy consent” to the fulfillment of God’s righteousness are endless, if we will but have the ears to hear and the eyes to see.

Dear friends of Jesus, every time we say “yes” in “holy consent” to God, we permit ourselves to be baptized in the pure waters of life.

Every time we say “yes” in “holy consent” to God we stand in the river with Jesus and John, and together we with them fulfill all righteousness.

Every time we say “yes” in “holy consent” to God, nothing gets left undone, and no one gets left out of the church’s ministry in the community.

Dear friends of God, it is my prayer that we will all stand together in the river of life this morning with Jesus and John and “just deal with it,” just deal with whatever it is that is keeping us from fully giving “holy consent” to God’s righteousness in our lives! Let’s do something together today for God!

Let’s all bow our heads together and close our eyes and imagine we are all standing together in Jordan.

Let’s all imagine that Jesus is there and John too!

Let’s all imagine that we are all standing together, you, me, Jesus and John too, all standing together cleansed in the pure water of life!

And if standing together cleansed in the pure water of life means you need to stand where you are and talk to God about some things in your life, then give your holy consent and permit it to be so right now!

Can y’all say “Amen” to that? Amen and amen