

Jesus and the Scriptures

Today we are going to look at three short blocks of Jesus' life: (1) the beginning of his ministry, from his baptism by John to his first sermon; (2) the final hours of his life, from the Last Supper to his death the next afternoon on the cross; and (3) resurrection Sunday, what he said to his followers on the day he rose from the dead.

We are going to look at how Jesus used the Scriptures, which for him was the OT. We will see that for Jesus, Scripture was the voice of God. Scripture was God telling him how to understand himself, how to explain himself, telling him what to do, and how to live.

In our churches there are teachers and teachings that put the Bible aside in one way or another. The question is not, do we think the Bible is the voice of God. The question is, do we want Jesus, the real Jesus, the Jesus that the Gospels give us? Do we want the real Jesus, the Jesus the Gospels give us? If we do, the Scriptures are the voice of God.

Block One: Jesus and the Scriptures at the start of his Ministry. John the Baptist gave God's call to people: be baptized to show God your repentance, and to receive his forgiveness of sins.

Jesus of Nazareth also felt God's call on *his* life. He did not need to repent or have his sins forgiven, but he did need to say "yes" to God's call to him. In that way, he was doing the same thing, in his baptism, as all of us in our baptisms – saying "yes" to God's call.

When Jesus was baptized, I'm going with Mark 1 here, he saw the heavens torn open, and the Spirit came down on him like a dove, and he heard a voice from heaven say, "you are my son, the loved one, in you I delight." In that line, God was referring to three Scriptures, to show Jesus what his call was, to show Jesus what he had just said "yes" to.

The first Scripture was Psalm 2. Ps 2 is a messianic psalm, and Ps 2 gives us the messiah's words: *I [the messiah] will proclaim the Lord's decree: he said to me, "you are my son."*

Jesus just heard a voice from heaven that said, "*you are my son.*" That was God's decree to Jesus. God was saying to him, "You, Jesus, are the messiah of Psalm 2. What am I calling you to do? Read Ps 2, that's you, you are the Christ." Ps 2 is the first Scripture God gave Jesus.

"You are my son, the loved one, in you I delight." Isaiah has several poems about God's servant, whom God will send. "In you I delight" comes from Isa 42, from the first of the servant poems, and from the first sentence of that first servant poem. Here are God's words in Isaiah 42: *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one, in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him.*

Jesus has just been baptized by John, just come out of the water, the Jordan River, and he's just received the Holy Spirit, coming down on him like a dove.

And a voice from heaven says, “in you I delight.” And Jesus knows that Isaiah says, *Here is my servant, my chosen one, in whom I delight, I will put my Spirit on him.*

What is God telling him? God is saying to him, “Jesus, not only are you my son, the messiah, you are also the chosen servant of Isaiah’s servant poems. That’s you, Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus will know that this includes Isa 53, the fourth servant poem, which describes the chosen servant dying a shameful and unjust death, the death of a criminal.

There was probably a quiet groan in Jesus when he put this together, and realized that if Isa 42 is about him, Isa 53 is also about him. God also gave Jesus Isaiah’s servant poems.

What about the middle line, “the loved one”? “You are my son, the loved one, in you I delight.” “The loved one” is not in Psalm 2 or Isaiah’s servant poems. But in another Scripture, Genesis 22, God said to Abraham: *Take your son, your only son, the loved one – Isaac – and sacrifice him as a burnt offering in the place I will show you.*

God was saying to Jesus, “you are my son, the loved one. Jesus, you will be my Isaac son. I will sacrifice you as an offering.”

When God said to Jesus, “you are my son, the loved one, in you I delight,” God certainly meant all that those words mean at face value. Absolutely. But that’s not all: God was also saying to Jesus, “read Ps 2, that messianic psalm, read Gen 22, Abraham offering Isaac, and read Isaiah’s servant poems. Those three Scriptures are explaining my call to you.”

How much of this did Jesus know at the beginning of that day, before John baptized him? I do not know and will not guess. But this much is clear, that by the end of the afternoon, when Jesus had had some time to process these Scriptures, he knew a lot more about God’s call to him than he had known before he was baptized. For Jesus, this was all important, it was essential.

Jesus did not need to be Jewish Bible scholar to figure this out. Jewish synagogues had a three year cycle of Scripture readings. Any devout Jewish 30 year old man or woman had heard all of these Scriptures read repeatedly, and had God said this to *any* of them, they would have figured it out before very long.

Here are some NT examples. “Shepherds were watching their flocks and night.” Many of you know which story that is. “Turn these stones into bread.” “Can you drink the cup I drink?” “We have five loaves and two fish.” “Take this cup from me.” “Why have you forsaken me?” Each of these lines reminds us of a Jesus story. That’s what God was doing with Jesus.

We might think, Jesus is the Son of God, he’s received the Holy Spirit, surely he does not need the Scriptures. That is completely wrong. He is Son of God, and he’s received the Holy Spirit, and God calls him using the Scriptures.

Jesus heard the voice of God, audibly. God said: “Read these Scriptures, Jesus of Nazareth, they will give you my call to you. When you were baptized, this is what you agreed to do.”

Immediately after his baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew and Luke record the same three temptations. Every time, in both Matthew and Luke, Jesus responded to the devil by quoting from Moses in Deuteronomy.

Jesus used Scripture to resist temptations. “You pull me to this, Satan, but God wants me to do what I read in Moses.” I am sure it was a brutal fight for Jesus, there is nothing easy about resisting temptation, but the Gospels describe Jesus resisting by hanging on to the Writings.

After his temptations, Jesus went to his home town. He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, which Luke says he **always** did. Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah to the front, and read this: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.* Then Jesus sat down, and said, *This day, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.* (Luke 4:18f)

Jesus had just read from Isaiah’s last servant poem. When God spoke to Jesus, Jesus got it. How did he announce himself? He said what God gave him at his baptism. Isaiah wrote about God’s chosen servant, in whom God delighted, on whom God would put his Spirit. God told Jesus at his baptism, “This is you, Jesus.” Jesus was simply repeating this to his home town audience.

This first block, the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, is full of the Scriptures. We’ll see the same in his final hours, and again on his resurrection day. Now, fast forward three years ...

Block Two: Jesus and the Scriptures in his final hours. From the Last Supper until he died, about 20 hours, Jesus used the Scriptures ten times. This will be a quick tour. I will mention only six of them, but ten are in my notes.

(i) At the Last Supper, Jesus predicted that one of the 12 would betray him. How does he know this? He quoted Ps 41, *one who shared my bread has lifted his heel against me.* (John 13:18)

[omit] After the meal, Jesus said, *You are all going to leave me, because it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”* That’s from Zechariah. (Mark 14:27)

(ii) When they got to Gethsemane, Jesus quoted from Isa 53, the fourth servant poem, *He was numbered with the transgressors.* That means, “he’ll be treated like a criminal.” Jesus quoted that to his disciples, and said, *This will be fulfilled in me, and it will start soon.* (Lk 22:37)

[omit] Then Jesus became very distressed. He plainly dreaded what was about to happen. He said, *my soul is overwhelmed.* That’s a line that we find three times in Pss 42 and 43. When he was in anguish, the words of the psalms came out of him. (Mark 14:34)

(iii) Judas came with the crowd and they grabbed Jesus. Peter picked up a sword and used it to defend Jesus. Jesus said, *Put the sword away. I could call more than 12 legions of angels. But then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say I should submit to this?* (Matthew 26:53-54)

Jesus is doing the same thing here as he did at the beginning, when the devil tempted him in the wilderness. Jesus is tempted to do one thing, but God through Scripture is calling him to something else, and that's what he obeys.

[omit] Jesus said to the crowd that arrested him, *Every day I sat in the temple, but you did not take me then? But this all fulfills the prophets, who said it would happen this way.* (Matt 26:55)

(iv) They led Jesus to the Jewish Council. The high priest asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ?" Jesus said, *I am. And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God, and coming with the clouds of heaven.* Jesus quoted here from Ps 110 and Daniel 7. (Mark 14:62).

Jesus is doing the same thing he did at the start in the synagogue: he used the Scriptures to describe himself to people. The Scriptures were at the center of how he understood himself, so they were a natural way for him to explain himself to others.

[omit] When the soldiers were taking Jesus to the place of crucifixion, a big crowd was following and the women in the crowd were weeping loudly over what was happening to Jesus. Jesus said to them, *Do not weep for me, but for yourselves and your children.* And then he quoted from Hosea, about how bad it was going to get for them. (Luke 23:27f)

(v) Shortly before Jesus died, he prayed loudly, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* That's from Ps 22. Jesus prayed a lament psalm. (Mark 15:34)

(vi) And as he died Jesus prayed, *Into your hands I commend my spirit,* from Ps 31. (Luke 23:46) Jesus died praying the psalms.

From the Last Supper to his death, perhaps 20 hours, is the most intense part of Jesus' life. The pressure was on, great stress. And Scripture keeps pouring out of him. Jesus was paying attention to what happened around him, and the Scriptures were his understanding and his guide.

Block one was from Jesus' baptism to his first sermon; block two was from the Last Supper to his death. And ...

Block Three: Jesus and the Scriptures on the day he rose from the dead.

This from Luke 24. Two disciples were walking from Jlm to Emmaus. Jesus joined them, but they did not recognize him. These two were discouraged that Jesus had been crucified.

Jesus listened to them for a while, then he scolded them. “You are so foolish, and slow to believe all that the prophets said.” And beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained to them all the things, in the Scripture, that spoke about him.

When they got to Emmaus, the two invited Jesus to have supper with them, still not recognizing him. He began the meal in that special way that was unique to Jesus, which they had seen many times, and then their eyes were opened. They recognized him, and he disappeared.

They looked at each other and said, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened to us the Scriptures along the way?” They are scolding themselves for not recognizing him. Jesus had done two things that were unique to Jesus. The second was how he began the meal, which was how they recognized him.

The first was that their hearts burned while he taught the Scriptures. This only makes sense if Jesus often explained the Scriptures to his followers, as they walked along, and whenever he did that, their hearts burned with him. “Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened to us the Scriptures along the way?” They should have known back then; trademark Jesus.

This only makes sense if they knew Jesus to be a regular and delightful Scripture teacher. These two disciples immediately ran back to the other disciples and told them, “The Lord has risen!” While they were talking, Jesus appeared in their midst.

Jesus worked on the others a bit before they would believe it was really him, but then he gave all the disciples the same Bible lesson he gave the two on the road. He said to them:

“I told you before, that everything in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and psalms had to be fulfilled in me. They said, ‘the Christ has to suffer, and be raised from the dead the third day. And in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins has to be preached to all the nations.’ That has all been written, I told you this before.”

Jesus explained himself to his disciples by teaching from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

We’ve surveyed three blocks of time: from his baptism to his first sermon; from the Last Supper until his death; and the day he rose from the dead.

For Jesus, the Scriptures were the voice of his Father. Scripture told him what his Father’s call was, he used it to fight temptation, he used it to explain himself, and so on. Jesus loved the Scripture, he used it regularly, in his mind it was the voice of God to him and to everyone.

All the NT writers treat the OT this way. While teaching the NT, I learned to respect the OT.

We can’t say Jesus is Lord and at the same time hold the Scriptures away. In our different Christian circles, we hold the Scriptures away for a variety of reasons.

(1) We put Scripture aside because we have the Holy Spirit to speak to us, so we don't need Scripture. As if Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit!

(2) We hold Scripture away because we don't find it useful or practical, it doesn't meet our needs, we have more important things to say, let's talk about issues.

(3) We hold Scripture away because we believe it is just not true, not reliable or trustworthy.

(4) We put Scripture down because it teaches things we are sure must be backward and unjust and outdated.

But if we leave Scripture for any reason, we have left Jesus. He based his life and his message on Scripture, because to him, Scripture was the voice of God. We might think we can leave Scripture and still have Jesus. But that would be a different Jesus. Paul told the Corinthians, "if someone comes to you, and preaches a different Jesus, you receive that Jesus easily."

People have been preaching a different Jesus in the church for 2000 years. This is an old sermon.

False teaching has always been a big problem in churches. Humans have a strong sense of right and wrong, but not a good compass. We care about true and false, and feel certain of our views, but we disagree hugely from each other. We are all dismally vulnerable to being deceived, educated and uneducated alike. Our "true and false" compass is unreliable.

It is not that hard to fool *anyone*. That's why the church has always been so vulnerable to false teachings and teachers, and why the church has been so damaged by these over the centuries, starting already in the time of the apostles. The only real defense we have is to pick a voice we can trust. Jesus trusted the voice of God in the Scriptures. We follow Jesus, so we trust Scripture.

There have always been Scriptures that are hard to understand, parts of the Bible that devout people did not and do not really know how to handle. That's fine, that's not going away. There are difficult Scriptures. But most Scripture is clear, and what Jesus thought is clear.

The question is not, "do we think the Bible is the voice of God?" That is *not* the question. The question is, "do we want Jesus, the real Jesus, the Jesus that the Gospels give us?" It is impossible to separate the Jesus of the Gospels from the Scriptures. As soon as we separate them, we have quite a different Jesus.

Do we want the real Jesus, the Jesus the Gospels give us? If we do, the Scriptures are the voice of God. Amen.

Appendix: The Mind and Soul of Jesus, and Apollinaris

In my younger years I would have had trouble with this sermon, because of how I understood Jesus. I was taught to be an Apollinarian, though that name was not used.

The early fathers of the church, first five centuries, consistently taught that Jesus was fully human, and had the same human mind and soul that we all got from Adam and Eve. I was not taught that way, but the early fathers were clear on that. They also consistently taught that Jesus was fully God.

Apollinaris, a church leader in the 300s, was eager to defend the deity of Christ, and he taught that the *human* mind and soul of Jesus was taken over by the *divine* mind and soul of the Eternal Son. He taught that Jesus lived with a *divine* mind and soul, knowing and feeling as God would.

The fathers condemned this teaching in 381, at the first council of Constantinople. They did not condemn Apollinaris, but they condemned that teaching. And they were right. I was taught to be an Apollinarian, that Jesus had a divine mind and soul.

These fathers were the ones who taught us how to speak correctly about Christ's *deity*, and we learned about his *deity* from them, so we need to hear also how they speak about his *humanity*.

Reading the Gospels carefully showed me that I was wrong about these things, and that Jesus, though fully God, lived as fully human. This sermon today is a problem to Apollinarians, because if Jesus has a divine mind and soul, he has absolutely no need for Scripture. They end up saying things like, "he just used Scripture to give us an example." This explanation has been given to me in conversation.

The Scriptures know nothing of such explanations, and the early fathers rightly condemned all such teaching. The Gospels urge us to leave Apollinaris behind.