



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
Dr. Rob White – Senior Minister
<https://aulc.us>

TITLE: God-Powered

SERMON IN A SENTENCE: Just as Jesus was empowered by the Spirit that he received at his baptism, so God empowers us to live important lives through the power of the Spirit that we received at our baptism.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:13-17

Our scripture lesson today comes from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter three, verses thirteen to seventeen.

Starting at verse thirteen:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

But John tried to stop Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and yet You come to me?”

Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him to be baptized.

After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him.

And there came a voice from heaven:

This is My beloved Son.

I take delight in Him!

May the Lord add His Blessing on the reading of His Word!

When you were a small child or maybe still are, what were some of the things you did to please your parents?

- Take out the garbage
- Make your bed
- Pick up your toys
- Play peacefully with your brother or sister
- Do your homework
- Brush your teeth
- Tell your family members that you love them

There are many things you can do and say that would make your parents happy and let them know you love them, but you should also know that your parents love you just the way you are. You don't have to do things to earn their love. You are their son or daughter and they love you just because you are you!

There is a beautiful story in the Bible about a Father's love for His Son. When Jesus was baptized we are told "the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. 'Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'"

Jesus is the Son of God. You are also God's child. God loves you just the way you are. You don't have to do things to earn His love. You are loved just because you are you!

I am Doctor Rob White with the A U L C Ministries with our message this week.

I am happy that you can take a few minutes out of your busy week to be with us today!

Now, we don't know much about Jesus' childhood. In Luke's Gospel, there's a story about Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy getting lost from his parents on a visit to the temple. In Matthew, though, there's nothing between Jesus as a very small child and Jesus as a man. The last that Matthew told us about Jesus is the return from Egypt, where Joseph had taken his little family to escape the wrath of King Herod.

Now Matthew tells us about John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness and baptizing people in the river Jordan. John has been preaching a fire and brimstone sermon—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew chapter three verse two)—and then Jesus comes on the scene. Jesus asks John to baptize him.

Jesus and John know each other. They are cousins.

- Again, Luke tells us more than Matthew. Luke tells us that, many years earlier, Mary, pregnant with Jesus, visited Elizabeth, pregnant with John. On that occasion Elizabeth referred to Mary's unborn baby as "my Lord," and Elizabeth's unborn baby leapt in the womb for joy in the presence of Mary's unborn baby (as we see in Luke chapter one verse forty three).

- All that is just a way of saying that, even before he was born, John knew Jesus—and that John had the greatest respect for Jesus. I am confident that Jesus and John played together as children, although the Bible doesn't tell us that.

So Jesus comes to John, who has been calling people to repent and be baptized, and Jesus asks to be baptized.

Now John wouldn't baptize just anyone. He was choosy. When Pharisees or Sadducees presented themselves for baptism, John gave them a tongue-lashing instead. Pharisees and Sadducees were super-religious types who considered themselves better than anyone. John had no patience with them. Why should PERFECT people submit to a baptism of repentance? It didn't make any sense. If you wanted John to baptize you, you had better have a REPENTANT heart! The Pharisees and Sadducees didn't have repentant hearts.

That tells us something that we need to hear. If we want to be baptized, we need to come with repentant hearts too. Baptism isn't for people who just want to get their ticket punched—people who just want to cover the bases. Baptism is for people who want a new Godly direction for their lives.

But back to John the Baptist! John turned down Pharisees and Sadducees when they came for baptism, because they thought they were super-good. Then Jesus came for baptism, and John tried to turn him down too—but for the opposite reason—he really was super-good. Pharisees and Sadducees only thought that they were good—but Jesus really was good. John preached a baptism of repentance, but he knew that Jesus had nothing for which to repent. He concluded that baptism didn't make any sense for Jesus, and in a way he was right.

But Jesus asked to be baptized anyway—**"to fulfill all righteousness,"** he said (verse fifteen of our scripture lesson today). What does that mean? It means simply this: Righteousness is doing what God wants us to do. God had a plan for Jesus' life, and God's plan included Jesus being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit. The anointing of the Spirit was important, because the Spirit would empower Jesus to do his work. So Jesus, in being baptized, was simply being righteous—doing what God wanted him to do—cooperating with God's plan for his life.

We might take a note from that as well. God's plan for us involves baptism too. It's at baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit—just as it was at Jesus' baptism that Jesus received the Spirit. It's at our baptism that we begin a new walk—a new journey with God dwelling within us—empowered to do God's work—identified as God's people.

Baptism is part of God's plan for our lives. God wants us to be baptized, so we need to do that—just as Jesus did—**"to fulfill all righteousness"**—to cooperate with God's plan for our lives—to obey God.

Jesus' baptism concluded with the Holy Spirit descending upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (verse seventeen of our scripture lesson today). The Father was acknowledging the Son's faithfulness.

The Father said that he was well pleased with Jesus, and I'm sure he was. Even earthly fathers take pleasure in seeing their sons doing the right thing. The Perfect Father took pleasure in seeing Jesus getting started on the right foot—cooperating with the Father's plan for his life—obeying the Father's call to be baptized and to receive the Holy Spirit.

I'm sure that God takes pleasure at our baptism too. Jesus' baptism was his preparation for ministry. Our baptism is our preparation for life. After baptism, by the power of the Spirit, Jesus changed the world forever. After our baptism, the Spirit empowers us too—gives us Godly power—gives us power to change the world.

I'm not trying to suggest that we are equal to Jesus. Jesus was unique. I am suggesting, however, that the same Spirit that empowered Jesus is available to us as well. We cannot expect to do what Jesus did, but empowered by God's Spirit we can do our part—we can do the part that God has called us to do. By God's grace, we can become God-directed and God-powered.

Men and women filled with God's Spirit have been changing the world, a little here and a little there, for many centuries. There have been famous Christians doing great work—Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, Martin Luther King. People like that have influenced thousands of lives—millions of lives. They have changed the world for good by God's power. We might say that they are God-powered.

But there are millions of Christians out there today of whom you have never heard—Christians who are changing people's lives for good—a little here and a little there. Most will live and die known only by their families and friends.

- They will say a kind word here and do a kind deed there.
- They will listen when a friend needs to talk.
- They will teach a Sunday school class or sing in the choir.
- They will give money for disaster relief.
- They will help to build a church.
- They will do God's work day by day in ways great and small—mostly small.

And God will bless their efforts, and their lives will make a difference—because their lives are God-powered.

Let me give you an example from my own experience. There was a kind, elderly woman in one of my nursing home congregations who would meet and greet every new resident that moved into the nursing home. She wasn't an ordained minister or even any part of a church ministry staff, she was just an ordinary person, however, doing this, was her ministry.

She would sit down with each new resident and talk with them, get them acquainted to the their new home and while doing this, she would witness to them about what Christ had done in her life!

She would get the usual stares and questions and it seemed to her, that no one was being receptive to Christ's love and that no one really cared. But, she kept on doing it.

One day, after a Sunday Service, she came up to me and asked me what she was doing wrong, because no one was accepting Christ and no one seemed to be listening.

I explained to her that she was here to plant the seeds of Christ's love and that God would water those seeds and make them grow.

She might not see how many seeds she planted actually sprouted and grew until the day she was in Heaven with Jesus and He would then show her just how fruitful her ministry really was!

She went away with a smile on her face, realizing now, that there may not be immediate acceptance to her witnessing.

A few weeks later, she came to me with a big smile on her face exclaiming that a new resident had accepted Christ during one her meet and greet sessions! She finally realized that her ministry was not in vain after all!

The Holy Spirit was working in her and she seen what being God Powered was all about!

Today, she is in Heaven and now knows the extent of her ministry here on earth and I am willing to bet that she is wearing the biggest smile ever!

At our baptism, we received the same Spirit that Jesus received at his baptism. The same Spirit that empowered Jesus for ministry dwells within us—empowers us. That means that every person in this congregation has extraordinary potential—has power to change the world, a little or a lot—because we are God-powered.

You might think that your life is ordinary—and it will probably seem ordinary until the day you die. But when you get to heaven, watch out. I believe that God will have a surprise in store for you!

- On that day, you will learn that every faithful act of your life took place under God's watchful eye.
- On that day, you will learn that God is even more faithful than you are.
- On that day, you will learn that the Spirit worked miracles that remained hidden to you.
- On that day, I believe that you will learn that the Spirit touched your life day by day—blessing every kind word that you uttered—blessing every faithful deed that you did—causing those kind words and faithful deeds to grow large—causing them to bless the lives of others—causing them to change the world.
- On that day, I believe that you will learn that, empowered by the Spirit, your life amounted to more than you thought—more than you could ever have imagined!

If you look around this congregation today, you will see one ordinary person after another. It doesn't seem that we amount to a whole lot—but empowered by the Spirit, we do. I think of us as Christian Johnny Appleseeds.

Johnny Appleseed was a real person, you know. His name was John Chapman. He was a Christian who lived two centuries ago. God gave John Chapman a vision of a land filled with apple trees. Chapman gathered apple seeds from cider presses, and planted apple trees across the land.

If you had followed John Chapman across Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, you would not think that his life amounted to anything. He planted apple seeds—and that's all he did. When he had come and gone, you couldn't see much difference. The land looked pretty much the same after he passed by.

But if you had come by twenty years later, you would have seen a landscape transformed by John Chapman—a landscape of trees where there had been barren land—a landscape graced by apple

blossoms in the springtime—and trees laden with apples in the fall. You would have seen men with apples in their lunchboxes and women baking apple pies. You would have seen children enjoying apples from John Chapman's trees. And, as they say, "An apple a day keeps the ... well you know ... doctor away." Apples are healthy.

- I can imagine that thousands of people lived longer, healthier lives because of Johnny Appleseed.
- I can imagine people being spared the pain of illness because of Johnny Appleseed.
- I can imagine parents living long enough to raise their children because of Johnny Appleseed.
- I can imagine couples able to grow old together because of Johnny Appleseed.
- I can imagine all sorts of good things happening as a result of John Chapman's obedience to God—as a result of his fulfilling all righteousness—as a result of his cooperating with God's plan for his life.

And so it is with us. We live one ordinary day after another, and our lives don't seem special. We are neither rich nor famous. If we look back at yesterday or last week, what we did seems unimportant.

But if we will "fulfill all righteousness"—be obedient to God—cooperate with God's plan for our lives—God will make of us something wonderful. Our lives might not seem special now, but when we get to heaven God will show us a landscape transformed by our kind words and faithful deeds—a land full of blessings that came from our hands—blessings largely invisible to us now—blessings brought into full flower by the power of the Spirit who guides us.

So live out your baptism—live out your faith—rejoice in the Spirit—and expect to do great things! By God's power, you will!

That's our Lord's message for this Lord's Day and I hope you got a blessing out of it!

Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

Thank you all for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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