

Preparation for Ministry

In our encounters with Jesus last week we saw God touch earth by entering the world in the form of a small baby. Even as an infant, Jesus' presence brought out the best and worst in men's hearts. This week we will look at the events leading up to Jesus' ministry among both the great teachers in the Temple and the poorest in the countryside seeking truth along the Jordan River. Along that river we will be introduced to a few insignificant fishermen who think they have found the one for whom all Israel is waiting. Our final encounter will be one that is less human in nature, as Jesus faces the one who would not have had him come into the world at all. It will be an exciting week and I look forward to our gathering again to discuss all that you have discovered about our Lord.

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

In our lesson today we will be comparing what three gospels tell us about John the Baptist. Let's start in Luke 3:1-6 as our primary scripture, but we will also follow in parallel with what Matthew and John each have to tell us. Luke has some very specific information. Remember, he is the one giving us a detailed account, having researched all the eyewitness testimonies he could find. His purpose was not so much to give us new information, but *complete* information. Before beginning this lesson, take a few minutes to pray to the Lord over the time you are spending in his Word. This passage is heavily packed with his truth, pray for a heart to understand it!



Read Luke 3:1-6 and complete the following questions:

When was John Baptizing?

Who were the high priests?

Where did the word of God find John?



Next read Matthews account in Matthew 3:1-6

*"Who do you say I am?":
A Study of Jesus*

How does Matthew describe John's appearance in Matthew 3:4?

- How does 2 Kings 1:8
- Zechariah 13:4

What does Matthew 3:5 tell us about who came to hear him?

John was a man called by God to be a prophet. A prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God. John's physical appearance would have reminded his hearers of the prophets of old – Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah. He was a man of God who lived separated from the religious system in Jerusalem, but he was receiving a word from God that the Temple priests were not hearing. In fact, it is clear through John's harsh words to them, they did not have the ears to even hear God's word. John was a prophet of God, the first to come in 400 years! The people of Israel were expecting a prophet to come with the Messiah. John's similarity in appearance with Elijah and his call to repent in preparation for a new kingdom drew large crowds. He spoke with authority and truth that rang true in the hearts of the people of Israel. He did not speak to glorify himself, but to point out the coming Messiah.

John's message was one of preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and the Messiah. He called for repentance of sin. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary,

The concept of a coming kingdom was well known in Old Testament Scriptures. But the idea that repentance was necessary in order to enter this kingdom was something new and became a stumbling block to many Jews. They thought that as children of Abraham they would automatically be granted entrance into Messiah's kingdom. John's message, however, was that a change of mind and heart was necessary before they could qualify for the kingdom. They did not realize how far they had drifted from God's Law and the requirements laid down by the prophets.

- ✧ Read Malachi 3:7-18. In what ways were the people of Israel, in particular the Pharisees and the Sadducees, "the brood of vipers", guilty of robbing God?

*John's message struck the hearts of the crowds gathered to hear him
and many were baptized. (Matt 3:6)*



Read Matthew 3:7-12; Luke 3:7-18

It is not surprising that John had harsh words for the Pharisees and Sadducees of the temple when they came to hear him at the Jordan.

- What is it he tells the Pharisees and the Sadducees they must do?
- How does one produce good fruit? Read John 1:15-18. What does he say regarding the Law and Jesus? Apply this to what Luke says in 3:10-14.

According to John the Baptist (in the Gospel of John passage, 1:15-18), Jesus existed before John came and *"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another."* That first blessing was the Law given to Moses which teaches us God's expectations of our behavior. It shows us how we ought to live in accordance with his will. Because we are unable to perfectly keep the Law, *"grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* not only to show us how to live according to the Law, that would be the "truth", but also to cover us with his grace in order to justify us in accordance of the Law. (Justified means to be "made right", held "not guilty" of our sins, but forgiven of them.)

In Matthew 3:11 John declares that he baptizes with water, but the one who comes will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Look up the following scriptures, what do you think he means by a baptism of the Holy Spirit and of fire?

- Acts 2:1-13
- Joel 2:28-29¹

In Matthew, John the Baptist uses the metaphor of a winnowing fork to separate the chaff from the wheat. The wheat to be placed in a barn and the chaff burned up. What do you think this image is meant to convey?

Christians today must still confess their sins, and repent of them. The Lord will surely forgive our sins when we repent with a sincere heart. Sin in the life of a believer is a giant chasm between the believer and God. The only way to bridge the chasm is through belief that Jesus can (and will) forgive sin, and that he is the lamb of God who takes away sin allowing us

¹ Some translations do not have verses 28-29, but are the beginning of the next chapter, see Joel 3:1-2.

fellowship with God. Ladies, if there are any among you who have unconfessed sin in your life, please pray that the Lord will unsettle your hearts, and stir your souls to confess, repent and seek his forgiveness. Even the smallest unconfessed sin will widen to a chasm separating you from your loving father. He sent his son so that you may cross back over that chasm to his loving arms. There is no peace like that of an unburdened heart.

Baptism of Jesus

In this lesson today we will be standing beside the Jordan River among the crowds coming to hear John the Baptist announcing the coming kingdom. Can you see him standing in the water as it swirls around him? Lord, today I pray that you will bring this passage of scripture vividly to life for these dear women. Let them see and hear the sound of the crowds, the questions of the skeptical Pharisees. Let them watch with wonder as they hear the Baptist describe the One to come after him, and let them watch with wonder as they see Jesus himself wade out into the waters Ladies, start your lesson with a prayer to our father that we will all have the ears to hear and the eyes to see his wonders recorded in today's scriptures.



Read Luke 3:15-18, 21-22; Matthew 3:13-17; and John 1:29-34. John tells us it's the next day when Jesus comes forth to be baptized.

John the Baptist had two missions from God, the first to prepare Israel to receive the Messiah, and second, to point out the Messiah when he came. His call to repentance from sin was to prepare Israel's heart to receive and recognize the Messiah. The baptism of water symbolized the washing away of sin. With repentance, turning away from sin, and turning toward God, the people of Israel would be in a state to receive and recognize the Messiah, and eventually receive the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew 3:13 Jesus comes to the Jordan to be baptized by John. What is John's response in the next verse?

As Jesus came forward and John recognized the Messiah, John was confronted by his own sins in the face of the Sinless One. He felt unqualified to baptize the sinless Messiah; rather the Messiah ought to baptize him. Jesus replies, *"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to _____."* What could this possibly mean? The best answer I've come across is from the New American Commentary:

Jesus has not come to confess any sin but "to fulfill all righteousness." He has previously fulfilled specific prophecies as well as more general

scriptural themes. Now he wishes to obey all the moral demands of God's will. "To fulfill all righteousness" means *to complete everything that forms part of a relationship of obedience to God*. In so doing, Jesus identifies with and endorses John's ministry as divinely ordained and his message as one to be heeded.

Put a bookmark in your Bible here in Matthew, we'll come back to this place after we take a look at the same passage in the Gospel of John.

John 1:29: John the Baptist proclaims upon seeing Jesus, "*Look, the _____ of God who takes away the sin of the world!*"

- In Exodus 29:38-42 what is to be offered as sacrifice and when as atonement for sin?
- Isaiah 52:7 speaks about Messiah as what?

John the Baptist was proclaiming Jesus as Isaiah's prophesied Messiah in no uncertain terms. John himself did not know that Jesus was the Messiah until he received a sign from God. What was the sign from God in verse John 1:32?

Who told John this would be the sign?

What was the reason given in John 1:31 for John to come baptize with water?

What will the man do whom the spirit rests upon?

Who does John testify that this person is?

Let's go back to Matthew 3: 17. Just as the Spirit of God descends upon Jesus, a voice from heaven is heard saying, "*This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.*"

In this moment we have the whole Trinity coming together as if setting a seal, or blessing, on the coming ministry of Jesus. Jesus' baptism while "fulfilling all righteousness" is also an anointing for the mission he is to carry out. God's favor and blessing are bestowed upon his son.

*"I have installed my King
on Zion, my holy hill."
I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.*

(Psalms 2:6-7)

✂ Before we conclude this lesson, we're going to take a little side-trip to the anointing of a king. Please turn to 1 Samuel 16:1, 10-13. What do you see in the Samuel passage to enlighten your understanding of Jesus' baptism and his coming ministry?

While Jesus' baptism was not a sign of repentance of his own sin, as he is sinless, it attached a whole new level of meaning to the rite of baptism. It anointed and initiated his ministry and made baptism a symbolic doorway to a new kind of life for all who would follow him.²

The First Disciples

So far this week we've had some pretty intense passages of scripture to study! Keep sticking with it! I know the Lord is so pleased with you for your devotion and dedication to this study. Nothing but blessings will come from spending time with Jesus in his Word studying his life. In our previous segment of homework we imagined ourselves on the banks of the Jordan watching Jesus' baptism. Today we will be there when some of Jesus' first disciples choose to follow him. Place yourself amongst these first followers. Your choice to pursue this study of Jesus places you as one of his disciples! That is what this study is all about, being one of his disciples. Disciples in the 1st Century were students who followed (*literally, walked after*) a mentor learning from both the teacher's words and actions.³ Today we will follow Jesus just as his first disciples did. Before we begin today, ask the Lord to encourage you in your study and to give you a hunger for his word. God bless you as you persevere in your study!

² *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All*, Charles R. Swindoll (Swindoll)

³ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)



John 1:35-50. As you are reading this passage, list the disciples who come to follow Jesus at each verse:

v. 37	Two disciples, one is identified in v. 40, who do you think is the other?		
v. 40		v. 43	
v. 41-42		v. 45	

Verse 37 tells us that two disciples followed Jesus. Andrew is the first of the two, and likely it is John, the writer of this Gospel, who is the second.

The two disciples begin to follow Jesus. When Jesus asks them what they want, respond with a question. Fill in the blanks.

"They said, " _____ " (which means Teacher), " _____ ?"

They acknowledge Jesus as "Rabbi" and their question of where he is staying illustrates their desire to follow him as his disciples. Jesus invites them to do so.

- ✧ Verse 42 tells us of Andrew bringing his brother Simon, whom Jesus renames "Cephas" (*Kepha* in Aramaic), or "Peter" (*Petro* in Greek), which all mean what? _____ What do you think led Jesus to give him this name?

Brothers Andrew and Peter, and John (and later his brother James) are all fishermen from Galilee. Philip and Nathanael are next called to follow Jesus. Nathanael comes to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel (Messiah) only when Jesus tells him he saw him under the fig tree before Philip called him. He then tells Nathanael, and indeed all the disciples, as well as us today, that we shall see even greater things to come should we follow him. Write out Jesus' statement in verse 51.

We have spent a lot of time in a few brief passages following the son of God, and his ministry has yet to even start! But, be encouraged! Just as Jesus promised Nathanael and the disciples who chose to follow him, we too following in his footsteps, will "*see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*"

Temptation in the Desert

We have one more passage to look at this week in our homework. I know that we've had a lot to study in some very defining moments in Jesus' life before his ministry even began. Our last reading this week will center on Jesus' testing in the desert. Another story we are all very familiar with, but one from which I hope we can glean some wonderful treasures! Ask the Lord to bless you with understanding of the Truth contained in this passage before you begin your reading. God bless you for keeping up with your homework this week! You are in the homestretch!



Matthew 4: 1-11 and Luke 4:1-13. Both gospels record Jesus' time in the desert, but with slightly different details. We will be looking at both passages. We are told that Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. This occurred after 40 days of fasting. The Greek word *peirazō* can mean both *to test* and *to tempt*. Temptation is something that Satan will do when we are weak, or right after we have been in a spiritual high place and susceptible to pride. Satan comes across Jesus when he is physically weak (hungry) and after his baptism and anointing in the Jordan. What the devil uses for temptation, God may use as a test to prove Jesus' faithfulness.⁴

Test 1: Matthew 4:3: "If you are the Son of God, tell these _____ to become _____"

Satan wasn't questioning *if* Jesus was the Son of God, he was testing to see what *kind* of son Jesus is. Would he be obedient to God's will or would he use his own power to turn the stones into bread and thereby satisfy his hunger? Write Jesus' response.

Jesus was in the desert to fast. The spirit led him there to fast, not to provide food for himself. See also Matthew 6:31-34, 7:9-11. How do these verses further illuminate Jesus' response?

Test 2: Matthew 4:5-6 Satan takes Jesus to the highest point on the Temple in Jerusalem and tells him, "If you are the Son of God," he said, " _____ ."

What was Jesus' reply to Satan?

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Satan is testing Jesus to demonstrate his power as the Son of God by throwing himself down from the high point revealing his identity through the angels' protection. The devil again knows that Jesus has the power to do this, and he cites Ps 91:11–12 to justify it. There God promises all who "dwell in the shelter of the Most High" (Ps 91:1) safeguarding and protection. The devil's mistake is to confuse the psalmist's stumbling so as to fall with Jesus' deliberately jumping off. We must not test God's faithfulness to his word by manufacturing situations in which we try to force him to act in certain ways.⁵

Test 3: Luke 4:5-8 Satan takes Jesus to a high place and shows him all the kingdoms of the world. *And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to _____, and _____.⁷ So if you worship me, it will all be yours."*

Until Jesus returns as the King of Kings, all authority over the world has been temporarily placed in Satan's hands. Satan is testing how Jesus will come to take over that authority. Will Jesus be obedient to his father's will, or will Jesus take over that authority by subjecting himself to Satan's authority? Jesus is being offered a cross-less messiah-ship and an instant kingdom, but in doing so Jesus would have to deny God his sovereignty and bow down to Satan.

What was Jesus' reply?

What does Exodus 20:1-6 say about worshiping God?

✂ Each of Jesus' three tests can easily correspond to three areas of human temptation:

1. Physical appetite or desires
2. Personal gain
3. Easy path to power or glory

Just as Satan altered or twisted scripture to tempt Jesus, he uses the same methods in tempting each one of us. By Jesus own example, what are some ways we can withstand temptation?

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