

The Life of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Baptized and Tempted: The Beloved Son Prepared

Matthew 3:13–4:11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson watches God prepare His Son for ministry through two defining events: the baptism and the temptation. Doctrinally, several things are at stake. The baptism reveals the triune God, the Father speaking, the Spirit descending, the Son in the water, and it displays Christ's full identification with sinners and His perfect obedience. Be careful here to distinguish Jesus' baptism from Christian baptism. Jesus had no sin to be forgiven; He was baptized to fulfill all righteousness and to identify with those He came to save. Christian baptism, by contrast, is for the forgiveness of our sins, our union with His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4). Both display obedience to God, but they are not identical, and your class will be served by a clear word on the difference.

The temptation establishes the true humanity of Christ and His sinless perfection. He was genuinely tempted, in real hunger and isolation, yet He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). He stands as the true and faithful Son who obeys where Adam and Israel failed, and He overcomes not by raw power but by the written Word of God. The final temptation carries particular doctrinal weight: the devil offers Him all the kingdoms of the world, a worldly crown without a cross, and Jesus refuses. This guards a right understanding of His kingdom, which is not a worldly empire seized by power, and it models exclusive worship of God alone.

Formationally, this passage is rich. The Father's love is spoken over the Son before any achievement, which frees us from the exhausting pursuit of approval through performance. The wilderness reminds us that God's favor does not exempt us from testing, and indeed the Spirit may lead us into it. And the threefold "It is written" trains us to wield Scripture against temptation. Help your class see that the way God prepared His Son, through affirmed love, tested faith, and the Word, is the way He prepares us still.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Matthew 3:13–15, the sinless Jesus comes to be baptized by John, and when John objects, Jesus answers, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Since Jesus had no sin to repent of, why did He insist on being baptized, and what does this reveal about His identification with us and His obedience to the Father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with John's objection, because it raises the very question the class will be asking. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and crowds came confessing. Jesus had nothing to confess. So why does the sinless one step into the sinner's river? John instinctively senses that this is backward.

Unfold Jesus' answer, "to fulfill all righteousness." His baptism is an act of perfect obedience and of deep identification with sinners. Though He had no sin, He took His place alongside those He came to save, the One who would later be numbered with the transgressors at the cross. From the very start, He is standing where we stand, beginning the work of bearing what is ours.

This is an important place to draw a careful distinction for your class, because the parallel is easy to confuse. Jesus' baptism is not the model of Christian baptism in every respect. He was not baptized for the forgiveness of His own sins, for He had none. Christian baptism is for the remission of our sins and unites us with His death, burial, and resurrection (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4). What the two share is glad obedience to God and the public marking of a life given over to Him. Make the distinction plainly so that no one concludes either that Jesus was a sinner or that baptism is unimportant.

Close on the heart of it. The Son's willingness to enter the water with sinners shows a Savior who does not save from a safe distance. He came down into our condition to lift us out of it. His obedience here is the first step on the road that ends at Calvary.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's identification with sinners, taking His place among those He came to save
- Jesus' baptism as an act of perfect obedience, fulfilling all righteousness
- The distinction between Jesus' baptism and Christian baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4)
- The sinlessness of Christ, who had nothing to repent of
- The beginning of Christ's saving work in His humble obedience

Discussion Prompts

- Why did John object, and what does his objection help us see?
- How is Jesus' baptism both like and unlike Christian baptism?
- What does it mean to you that the sinless Christ stepped into the river with sinners?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus submitted to the full path of righteousness even when it must have looked unnecessary to others. Where in your own life are you tempted to take a shortcut around full obedience, settling for what is easy or what looks right to others rather than what God asks?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question draws out the obedience theme from Jesus' example. Jesus did not pick and choose which parts of the Father's will to obey. He fulfilled all righteousness, even the parts that looked unnecessary or that exposed Him to misunderstanding.

Help the class name where they are tempted to do less. We are skilled at finding shortcuts, obeying God in the visible areas while quietly negotiating in the hidden ones, or substituting what looks impressive to others for what God actually asks. The temptation is rarely to abandon obedience altogether; it is to settle for a trimmed-down version.

Move toward concrete honesty. Ask each person to identify one area, a relationship, a financial practice, a private habit, a matter of integrity, where they have been settling for the easy path or the path that looks right to others. Jesus' full obedience is both the rebuke and the encouragement; He walked the whole road so that we, by His grace, can walk it too.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Full obedience to God versus selective or convenient obedience
- The temptation to substitute appearances for true faithfulness
- Integrity in the hidden areas of life, not only the visible ones
- Christ's complete obedience as both our pattern and our enabling grace

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to take a shortcut around full obedience?
- Do you ever settle for what looks right to others rather than what God asks? Where?
- What would full obedience look like in that area this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

As Jesus came up from the water, the Spirit descended like a dove and the Father spoke from heaven (3:16–17). How does this scene reveal the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together, and why is it significant that all three are present at the start of Jesus' ministry?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a key doctrinal block, for here is one of the clearest displays in all of Scripture of the Father, Son, and Spirit together. The Son stands in the water, the Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and the Father's voice speaks from heaven. Three persons, distinct yet together, one God. Help the class see all three clearly in the text.

Explain why this matters at the threshold of Jesus' ministry. The Father publicly identifies and approves the Son; the Spirit visibly anoints Him for the work ahead. Jesus does not launch His

ministry on His own authority alone but is sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit. The whole of the Godhead is engaged in the work of our salvation.

Guard against two errors gently if they arise. The scene does not show three Gods, for Scripture everywhere insists that God is one. Nor does it show one person merely playing three roles, for the Son is in the water while the Father speaks and the Spirit descends. Hold the distinction of persons and the unity of God together, as the text does.

Bring it to worship and assurance. The God who saves us is rich and relational in His own being. And the same Father who delighted in His Son delights, through that Son, in all who are united to Him. The voice over the Jordan is, in Christ, a word of grace toward us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together at the baptism
- The unity of God alongside the real distinction of persons
- The Spirit anointing Christ for ministry (compare Acts 10:38)
- The Father's public identification and approval of the Son
- The whole Godhead engaged in the work of salvation

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see each of the three persons in this scene?
- Why is it significant that the Spirit and the Father are involved as Jesus begins His ministry?
- How does it deepen your worship to see the Father, Son, and Spirit together here?

Question 4

Student Question:

The Father declared His love and delight in the Son before Jesus had preached a sermon or worked a miracle. Where do you tend to chase approval through your performance, your work, or the opinions of others, and how would resting in God's love change the way you live this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is one of the most formationally powerful moments in the Gospels, so give it room. The Father says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," before Jesus has done any public work. The love comes first. The approval is not earned by performance; it is the ground from which the performance flows.

Hold this against the way most of us live. We are approval-hungry people, forever trying to prove our worth through achievement, productivity, appearance, or the praise of others. We work in order to be loved. The gospel reverses the order: in Christ, we are loved, and from that love we work.

Be careful here to apply this rightly. The Father's words to His unique Son are spoken, through union with Christ, over all who are His children. Believers are accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6). This is not a license for complacency but a release from the exhausting treadmill of earning. Invite each person to name where they are striving for approval, and what it would look like this week to work and live from God's love rather than for it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Father's love and approval as the ground, not the reward, of the Son's ministry
- The exhausting pursuit of worth through performance and human approval
- The believer's acceptance in Christ, the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6)
- Living and serving from God's love rather than to earn it

Discussion Prompts

- In what arenas do you most chase approval through performance?
- How does it strike you that the Father loved the Son before any achievement?
- What would change this week if you truly rested in being loved by God?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Matthew 4:1, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and Hebrews 4:15 says He was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin. Why was it necessary for Jesus to face real temptation, and what comfort does it give us that our Savior truly understands what we endure?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Establish the reality of the temptation first. This was no staged performance. Jesus, in real human flesh, after forty days of fasting, faced genuine temptation. Hebrews insists He was tempted in every respect as we are. To deny the reality of His temptation is to deny the reality of His humanity.

Then hold the second half just as firmly: yet without sin. He felt the full force of temptation, more fully than we do, for we usually give in before the pressure reaches its peak, while He bore it to the end and never yielded. His sinlessness is not the sign that His temptation was unreal; it is the measure of how completely He overcame.

Explain why this was necessary. Jesus had to be tested as a true human to stand as our representative and to become a sympathetic high priest. Because He has been there, in the hunger and the pressure and the lonely struggle, He is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18). He does not counsel us from a distance; He has walked the wilderness Himself.

Bring the comfort home. When you are tempted, you are not facing something your Savior does not understand. You come to a high priest who has felt it all and conquered, and who now offers mercy and grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). His victory becomes the ground of our hope.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The true humanity of Christ, genuinely tempted (Hebrews 4:15)
- The sinlessness of Christ, who never yielded to temptation
- Christ as our sympathetic high priest who understands our struggles (Hebrews 2:18)
- The necessity of Christ being tested as our representative
- Drawing near for mercy and grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:16)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important that Jesus' temptation was real and not merely for show?
- How does it comfort you that your Savior has felt the full force of temptation?
- How might you draw near to Him for help the next time you are tempted?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus faced His fiercest testing immediately after the high point of His baptism, and in a season of hunger and isolation. How do you tend to handle the wilderness seasons that often follow spiritual highs, and what helps you stand firm when you feel weak and alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw attention to the timing, because it overturns a common assumption. We tend to think that closeness to God should produce smooth sailing. Yet the Spirit led Jesus from the mountaintop of the Jordan straight into the desert. Spiritual highs are often followed by wilderness seasons, and that is not a sign of failure or abandonment.

Help the class recognize their own wilderness patterns. After a powerful worship service, a retreat, a baptism, or a season of answered prayer, temptation and discouragement often press in. The enemy strikes when we are tired, hungry, and alone, just as he came to Jesus after forty days of fasting. Naming the pattern helps us prepare for it.

Offer practical helps for standing firm. Jesus was sustained by the Word of God, by clarity about His identity as the beloved Son, and by unwavering worship of the Father. The same means sustain us: a heart stored with Scripture, a settled assurance of who we are in Christ, and the refusal to bow to lesser things. Encourage students to anticipate the wilderness rather than be surprised by it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The pattern of testing following spiritual highs
- God's favor not exempting us from trials, and even leading us through them
- The enemy's strategy of attacking when we are weak, weary, and alone
- The means of standing firm: the Word, settled identity in Christ, and worship

Discussion Prompts

- Have you noticed temptation or discouragement following times of spiritual closeness? When?
- What tends to make you most vulnerable in a wilderness season?
- What helps you stand firm when you feel weak and alone?

Question 7

Student Question:

Three times Jesus answered the tempter with the words "It is written," quoting Scripture rather than relying on displays of power (4:4, 7, 10). What does this teach us about the authority and sufficiency of God's Word as our defense against temptation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice first what Jesus did not do. He did not debate the devil on equal terms, nor did He simply overpower him with a show of divine might, though He could have. He met each temptation with the written Word of God, drawn from Deuteronomy. The Son of God treated Scripture as the decisive authority.

Draw out the implication. If Jesus, who is God in the flesh, chose to stand on the written Word, how much more must we. The Word is not merely helpful; it is sufficient and authoritative for the battle against temptation. Paul calls it the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), the one offensive weapon in the Christian's armor.

Highlight the precision of Jesus' answers. Each temptation was met with a specific, fitting passage, not a vague spiritual sentiment. This is possible only for someone who knows the Scriptures well. A Bible left on the shelf is no defense; a Bible written on the heart is a mighty one. This sets up the next, more personal question.

Affirm the all-sufficiency of God's completed Word. We do not need new revelations or fresh voices to face temptation. The Scriptures we have are enough, able to make us wise and to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Christ has shown us the way: meet the lie with the truth that is written.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority and sufficiency of Scripture in the face of temptation
- The Word of God as the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17)

- Christ's example of meeting specific lies with specific truth
- The all-sufficiency of the completed Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Discussion Prompts

- What do you make of the fact that Jesus relied on Scripture rather than sheer power?
- Why is a precise knowledge of the Word more useful in temptation than a vague spirituality?
- How well do you know the Scriptures you would need in your own moments of testing?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus could meet each lie with a specific truth from Scripture because He knew it deeply. What lies does the enemy most often whisper to you, and which truths of God's Word do you most need to know well enough to answer them in the moment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the previous one toward the student's own battles. Temptation usually comes dressed as a lie: you will be happier this way, no one will know, God is holding out on you, you are beyond forgiveness. Help the class identify the particular lies they hear most often.

Then connect each lie to its answering truth. The lie that God is withholding good is answered by His proven goodness and the gift of His Son. The lie that we are beyond grace is answered by the gospel. The lie that hidden sin is harmless is answered by the truth that all is open before God. The practice is to know the truth well enough that it rises up in the moment, as it did for Jesus.

Encourage a concrete habit. Suggest that each person choose one recurring lie and one passage of Scripture that answers it, and commit that passage to memory this week. The goal is not more information but readiness, a heart so stored with truth that the answer is there when the tempter speaks.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Recognizing temptation as a lie to be answered with truth
- Knowing and memorizing Scripture for the moment of testing
- Matching specific lies of the enemy with specific truths of God
- Building readiness rather than merely accumulating information

Discussion Prompts

- What lies does the enemy most often whisper to you?
- What truth of God's Word answers that lie most directly?

- Will you commit one such passage to memory this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

In the final temptation (4:8–10), the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would only bow down and worship him, and Jesus refused, choosing the path that would lead to the cross and declaring that God alone is to be worshiped. What does this reveal about the kind of kingdom Jesus came to bring, His refusal of every shortcut around the cross, and the call to worship and serve God alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it touches several truths at once. Take it slowly. The devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, a crown without a cross, a throne without suffering. It is the offer of a worldly empire seized by compromise rather than a kingdom won by sacrifice.

Show what Jesus' refusal reveals about His kingdom. He would not take the kingdoms of the world on the devil's terms, because the kingdom He came to bring is not a worldly empire of power and political dominion. His throne would be reached by way of the cross, His crown would first be one of thorns, and His reign would be established not by force but through His death, resurrection, and the birth of His church. This guards us against every notion that Christ's kingdom is an earthly, political power, whether in His day or in some imagined future earthly reign. He reigns now, from the right hand of the Father, over a kingdom that is His church.

Highlight the refusal of the shortcut. Every temptation in the wilderness was, at heart, an offer of a way around the cross: satisfy yourself now, prove yourself spectacularly, gain the world without suffering. Jesus refused them all. He would not purchase glory cheaply. This sets the trajectory of the whole Gospel toward Calvary, where the true crown is won.

Land on exclusive worship. Jesus answers, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." The deepest issue in the final temptation is worship. To gain the world by bowing to the enemy is to lose everything. The same choice presses on us: we are constantly offered the world's rewards in exchange for compromised worship. Christ shows us that God alone is worthy, whatever the cost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The nature of Christ's kingdom as not a worldly, political empire
- Christ reigning now through the cross, resurrection, and His church, not a future earthly reign
- Jesus' refusal of every shortcut around the cross
- The call to worship and serve God alone (Matthew 4:10; Deuteronomy 6:13)

- The temptation to gain the world at the cost of compromised worship

Discussion Prompts

- What does Jesus' refusal of the kingdoms of the world tell us about His kingdom?
- Why was every temptation, at heart, an offer to bypass the cross?
- Where are you offered the world's rewards in exchange for compromised worship?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the river and the wilderness, the affirmation of the Father, the testing of the Son, and the power of the Word, name one specific way you sense God preparing and forming you through this lesson, and one step you will take to follow Jesus more closely as a result.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson's themes and turns them toward life. The way God prepared His Son is the way He prepares His people: He speaks His love over us, He allows our faith to be tested, and He equips us with His Word. Help students see their own season in light of this pattern.

Invite a specific response in one of these directions. Some need to rest in the Father's love rather than striving for approval. Some are in a wilderness and need to stand firm rather than conclude that God has abandoned them. Some need to take up the Word with new seriousness, storing it in their hearts for the battle. Encourage each person to name the one that fits.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ. He went through the river and the wilderness ahead of us, and He goes with us still. The preparation He underwent qualifies Him to lead us through our own. Encourage the class to write down their one truth and one step, and to walk into the week trusting the Son who was prepared, and who now prepares them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God forming His people through affirmed love, tested faith, and His Word
- Discerning one's own season in light of Christ's preparation
- The value of a specific, concrete step over a vague intention
- Christ as the One who has gone before us and goes with us

Discussion Prompts

- Which theme of this lesson speaks most directly to your current season?
- What is one specific way you sense God preparing and forming you right now?
- What single step will you take this week to follow Jesus more closely?