

The Life of Christ

Lesson 3: Baptized and Tempted: The Beloved Son Prepared -- Matthew 3:13-4:11

Before the first sermon, before the first miracle, before a single sick person was healed or a single storm was stilled, there was a river and a wilderness. Matthew slows down and lingers here, at the threshold of Jesus' public life, because what happens at the Jordan and in the desert will set the pattern for everything that follows. The Beloved Son is being prepared, and we are invited to watch.

Picture the scene at the river. John has been baptizing crowds who come confessing their sins, and then Jesus steps into the line. John is stunned. This is backward; the lesser should be baptized by the greater. But Jesus, who had no sin to confess, insists. "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness," He says, and steps down into the water alongside the very sinners He came to save. And as He comes up, heaven tears open. The Spirit descends like a dove. The Father's voice rolls across the water: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In a single moment, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all revealed.

Then, strangely, the same Spirit who descended in blessing leads Jesus straight into the wilderness to be tested. The mountaintop gives way to the desert. Forty days of hunger, and then the tempter comes, probing, twisting, offering shortcuts. Turn these stones to bread. Throw yourself down and let the angels catch you. Bow to me, and I will hand you all the kingdoms of the world without a cross. Three times the enemy strikes, and three times Jesus answers not with displays of power but with the written Word of God: "It is written."

Here is the Son who succeeds where Adam failed in his garden and where Israel failed in their wilderness. Here is the One who was tempted in every way as we are, yet never sinned, which is exactly why He can help us when we are tempted. This lesson is about how God prepares His Son, and how that same God prepares us, through the affirmation of His love, the testing of our faith, and the steady power of His Word. The river and the wilderness are not detours on the way to the real story. They are the real story beginning.

Group Discussion: Many people assume that following God faithfully should make life smoother and remove our struggles. Yet immediately after the glory of His baptism, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted. What does this suggest about the relationship between God's favor and the trials we face?

Personal Reflection: Before Jesus had performed a single miracle, the Father declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Where do you find yourself trying to earn a sense of worth or approval through performance, and what would change if you truly rested in the love God has already spoken over His children?

Read Matthew 3:13–4:11

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 8:1-5, where God humbles and tests Israel in the wilderness, the very passage Jesus draws upon; Hebrews 4:14-16, where our great high priest, tempted yet without sin, invites us to draw near for help; 1 Corinthians 10:13, the promise that God provides a way of escape from every temptation; Psalm 2:7, the Father's declaration over His Son; Romans 6:3-4, where we who are baptized into Christ share in His death and walk in newness of life.