

The Synoptic Gospels

Week 3

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Outline

John and His Baptism

- John's Ministry

- Jesus' Baptism

The Temptation

- Satan's Temptation of Jesus

- Matthew's Portrait of Jesus' Origins

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A Voice Calling in the Wilderness

Not only does John the Baptist appear in all 4 gospels, but the following is also unanimously quoted.

Isaiah 40:3-5; 9-11—A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4 “Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; 5 Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” 9 Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, Lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” 10 Behold, the LORD God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. 11 Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

What follows implicitly from this citation?

A Voice Calling in the Wilderness

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1. John's arrival anticipates the final chapter in History
 - v.5—"glory of the LORD will be revealed"
 - v.10—"LORD God will come with might"
2. John's arrival anticipates the Messiah:
 - Powerful king's arrival (cf. Psalm 2:7-9)
 - Shepherd imagery is linked to Davidic messiah (Cf. Psalm 78:70-72; Eze 34:23, 37:24)
3. The Messiah is in some sense God Himself (Cf. Isaiah 9:6-7).

Boiled down—John is saying, "I'm here to announce the arrival of God himself!" Such a special role in God's plan makes it no surprise that his own birth was announced by an angel who also loosely cites Isaiah 40 (Luke 1:5-25).

John's Message

The primary function of John's message was to make way for Jesus, though not by formally heralding his advent with trumpets. His role was to call people to a godly life, and to prepare people for an even more divisive figure.

Here is a sketch of the key features of his ministry and message:

1. He indicates that Christ, who follows him, will baptize with the Spirit and fire. Whether he means two types of people or two types of baptism for the same people, it's clear that fire is reserved for the unrepentant (cf. Matt 3:10,12; Luke 3:9,17)
2. He calls people to repentance that exhibits itself in outward moral change. (His immediate prophecy of Jesus' Spirit-baptism indicates that this kind of change requires the Spirit; indeed, Jesus' baptism signals His authority to baptize.)
3. John's clothes and diet were both historically prophetic (cf. Luke 1:17, II Kings 1:8) and prophetic in their own right: their other-worldly austerity spoke harmoniously with John's eschatology ("wrath to come").

First Century Impact

Here are some historical pieces that increase the force of John's message.

- There were no prophets for roughly four centuries (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8)
- Gentile proselytes were baptized as a sign that they were converting and would follow the law. For John to baptize Jews, he's saying, you're no better than a Gentile. You actually have to live repentantly before God.
- The fact that he was baptizing beyond the Jordan indicates that when people left John they would have to re-enter Israel! (Numbers 34:12)
- He was well-known enough that Josephus mentions him and that he used water baptism as a symbol of inner repentance (*Antiquities* 3.5.2).

Twenty-first Century Application

What can John teach 21st C Americans?

- Bonhoeffer's Cheap vs. Costly Grace (taking salvation for granted vs. I Peter 1:17-19)
- Salvation by osmosis (socialization, family of origin) vs. true repentance
- Christians can often be ungrateful, irreverent, entitled
- Beware of Materialism!

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Why Did Jesus Get Baptized?

In light of John's baptism of repentance, even John is confused:

Matthew 3:13-14—Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?

Why might Jesus get baptized?

Why Did Jesus Get Baptized?

Why might Jesus get baptized?

1. Connection to Isaiah's Servant Songs
 - 42:1 "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations"
 - 53:11 "My *righteous* servant will justify many" (cf. Matt 3:15)
2. Leads the way into something he calls us to do, as a form of identification
3. His baptism is part of an elaborate type of Israel
4. Given the significance of John's ministry as the forerunner, this was a ceremonial initiation of Jesus' ministry and John's ministry's diminution
5. Given the presence of the Holy Spirit, to be part of the new humanity that Jesus is inaugurating (cf. Romans 5:17-19; John 3:5-8) one must be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

None of the above is outright exclusive of the others.

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Satan's Place in History

Satan is 4th person mentioned in all of Scripture: God, Adam, Eve and the Serpent. This indicates a massive role in both human and cosmic history. Here are some reasons why it's important for the Evangelists (gospel writers) to mention the temptation:

- Satan's temptation catalyzed the fall of Adam and Eve. It sends a powerful message that unlike Adam (Israel), Jesus resisted Satan's temptation: Jesus is worthy of superseding Adam (Israel).
- As believers with active sin natures, Satan is a very live problem. Christ's example teaches us two things:
 1. We are not condemned to follow Adam's example.
 2. Jesus resisted Satan only using tools available to us.

All of this indicates a way in which Jesus stands at the center of history, displacing Adam (Israel) and teaching us a new way.

Satan's Moves

It is probably likely that there was more to this encounter than these 3 episodes that would take less than 2 minutes to act out. (Cf. Matt 4:1-2; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1-2).

Satan's temptations call into question Jesus' identity, mission and/or special relationship with the trinity. Only worshipping Satan is intrinsically wrong.

1. *Bread from Stones*—Jesus is meant to work in the power of the Holy Spirit and in dependence on the Father while on earth. (Jesus' citation of Deut 8:3 invites comparison to the provision of mana in the desert.) [Lust of the flesh?]
2. *Jump from the Temple*—Satan is urging him to draw attention to Himself as Messiah, forcing the Father to rescue him in front of others. At this stage, Jesus is still keeping his identity veiled. His full glory won't appear until the Second Advent. [Boastful Pride of Life?]
3. *Receive the World for Worship* —Jesus will receive glory and dominion *from the Father* but only *after* the crucifixion. (This helps explain Jesus branding Peter as Satan when he rebukes Jesus.) [Lust of the Eye?]

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Israel Typology in Matthew

Most scholars agree (even if details differ) that Jesus is a type of Israel, or perhaps Moses.

Type	Israel	Jesus
Journey to Egypt	Shelter from Famine	Flee from Herod
Young Boys Killed	Pharaoh's Slaughter	Herod's Murder
Exit from Egypt	Great Exodus	Return to Nazareth
Passage thru Water	Passage thru Red Sea	Baptism
Testing in Desert	Desert Wanderings	Wilderness Temptation

Israel Typology in Matthew

Additional support for the typological interpretation:

- In the temptation, Jesus quotes exclusively from Deuteronomy, an address delivered to Israel in the desert before entering Canaan (cf. Deut 8:2)
- Less directly, it makes the (confusing) early parts of Matthew cohere better.

Note: Typology does not abrogate history. Indeed, the typology is vacuous without a historical foundation.

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