

Matthew 3-4 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

As we come to ch. 3, some 30 years have passed between v. 1 of ch. 3 and the last verse of ch. 2.

Chapter 2 ends with Jesus as just an infant in Nazareth.

We really know nothing of the intervening years of his life from then till the start of His mission 30 years later.

Luke tells us about an event that took place when he was 12 when His family took a trip to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Passovers.

Then we read that during these years he grew in stature with both God and man, but other than that we have no insight into what are referred to as the hidden years of Christ.

Now, there are some fanciful stories that were written many, many years later that forgers tried to pass off as genuine records of Jesus' life during this time but they've all been shown to be gross frauds.

Outline of Matthew

- I. JESUS' EARLY YEARS 1-2
- II. JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY 3-18
- III. JESUS' JUDEAN MINISTRY 19-20
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Tonight we're going to be in the 'II' section and here's what we'll be covering . . .

- A. The Forerunner of Jesus 3:1-12
- B. The Baptism of Jesus 3:13-17
- C. The Temptation of Jesus 4:1-11
- D. The Initial Ministry of Jesus 4:12-25

MATTHEW 3

- II. JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY 3-18

- A. The Forerunner of Jesus 3:1-12

¹In those days

Meaning the days just preceding the arrival of Jesus to begin His work as the Messiah.

John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" ³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'*"

⁴Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶and were baptized by him in the

Jordan, confessing their sins.

If I had walked out here tonight wearing a smock of camel's hair, tied around the waist with a rough leather belt, and munching on a locust, licking honey-covered fingers, and every so often shouting, "Repent!" *who* would you have known I was trying to imitate?

That's what John did – he was *imitating* someone – and that someone was the first of the prophets – *Elijah*.

Just like John, Elijah had come out of no-where to preach a message of repentance.

He spent a good deal of his time in the wilderness.

He's described in 2 Kings 1:8 as a hairy man who wore a leather belt.

And his food was what came to hand in the wilderness.

The other gospels tell us that it was *obvious* to the people that John was reprising the role of Elijah, so the priests and Levites asked him to *identify* himself – just *who* was he claiming to be?

John made it clear that he was **NOT** the Messiah – only His forerunner.

He said, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"

John didn't want the focus to be on *him*; he wanted the people to hear and heed the *message*.

They asked, "Who ARE YOU?" And he replied, "Who I am is not important; that's not the issue – what *I'm saying* is where you ought to be focused!"

John's method was to *preach – to proclaim!*

Preaching and teaching are two different things!

Teaching aims at making the message *understood* by explanation; it focuses on the mind, the intellect.

Preaching isn't so concerned with *explaining* as with simple, clear proclamation.

It aims at the heart, the will, seeking to effect change.

As you review the Bible teachers you've been most influenced by over the years, you can probably place them in either more of a *teaching* or *preaching* vein.

What's usually most effective is a good combination of each style, both teaching and preaching.

If all you hear is *teaching*, then your head gets full, but it may not get converted into action, into follow through.

If all you get is *preaching*, then you're highly motivated to do something, but you're not quite sure what, how, when or where.

John's ministry was a simple one of *preaching*, because his message didn't *need* any interpretation, explanation, parsing, or development.

John had one sermon and he preached it everywhere he went and every time he spoke – "Repent – NOW!"

There's an old rule for giving a sermon which says that you have to have an introduction, a body with three points, and a conclusion.

Here's John's approach to sermons:

- 1) Introduction – "Repent!"
- 2) Body: Point 1 – Repent Now! / Point 2 – Not Tomorrow! / Point 3 – Repent Today!
- 3) Conclusion – "Repent!"

Matthew tells us in v. 3 that John was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in 40:3 of one who would come as the *forerunner* of the Messiah.

Matthew drew this from John's *own claiming* this about himself in John 1:23.

As we said on Sunday, it was the practice in the ancient world for a king to send out an official herald to go along the route his royal entourage would take and forewarn people that their sovereign would visit their city.

The people would then repair the roads and spiff up their businesses & homes for the king's arrival.

Isaiah said that prior to the Messiah's arrival, a herald would come who would announce the coming of their King to inaugurate the Kingdom of Heaven. John claimed to be that herald.

What the people needed to do in preparation for the Messiah's coming was to get *morally* ready!

Now, here's what's amazing about John's mission and message; it resonated in the hearts of the common people – so much so that it sparked a *revival*.

As v. 5 says – the entire region flocked out to the wilderness to hear John and to follow through on their response.

This follow through was done in the form of *baptism*, which as we saw on Sunday was something Jews did *not* do – baptism was for Gentiles who *converted* to Judaism.

By being baptized, these Jews were admitting that when it came to spiritual things, they were no better than Gentiles – than rank *unbelievers*.

This was a *radical* thing to admit, and it wasn't long until the movement around John and the radical step of renewal and recommitment he was calling the people to, raised the hostility of the religious experts & leaders.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

Since this was our text last Sunday, I'll be more summary with it tonight.

Until John began his mission, it was the Pharisees & Sadducees who enjoyed the religious limelight.

And they were jealous of all the attention that had been diverted from them and their approach to religious piety, to this new upstart nobody.

They weren't about to let the new movement just go on without some opposition, so they joined the crowds going out to see the Baptizer, masking their hostility behind a thin veneer of curiosity.

But John *knew* their motives weren't pure and nailed them with a stern rebuke.

Notice in v. 9, John speaks out what they were *only thinking!*

. . . and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’

They heard John's call to repentance and baptism and said to themselves, “We're Pharisees and that means we're *righteous*, so we don't *need* to repent. And we're *Jews*, so we don't need to get wet!”

They believed that being Jewish *automatically* meant they were saved.

The Jews considered Abraham utterly unique among all men who have ever lived.

So righteous was he and so in God's favor that it was thought his merits covered all of his descendants. ^[1]

Writings from that time reveal it was a common belief that Abraham sat just outside the gate into Hades, making sure that none of his descendants through his grandson Jacob, went there.

John blasts this kind of thinking – being a *physical descendant* of Abraham no more earns you heaven than being a stone does!

Salvation is an issue of the *spirit*, the *heart*; not the flesh, or any cutting done in one of the body's members!

And one man's spiritual capital, his merits, cannot be inherited by another.

Coupled to the message of repentance, John attached a sense of *urgency*.

He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” it's at the door.

As he rebuked the Pharisees & Sadducees, he did so with the same sense of *immediacy*.

This wasn't the time to enter in to a religious debate or to argue the fine points of genealogy -

¹⁰And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

He had just told them to bear fruit that was the proof of genuine repentance. The talk must be validated by the walk.

Now he urges them to lay aside their petty disputes and to get serious with God.

Bear fruit *right now*, not tomorrow, not when it's “more” convenient, but *now*, because the axe of God's judgment is already on its downward arc and if you're a tree without fruit, you're destined for judgment!

I want to pause here and issue a warning & plea to anyone here who're stuck in a place of unbelief

and have failed to commit themselves to Jesus because they have questions.

Over the years, I've had the chance to talk with lots of people who have questions and doubts.

These people fall into two basic categories;

1) those with honest questions who once you answer them, the barriers to faith are removed and they move into faith in Christ.

2) & those whose questions *aren't really honest* – they're excuses for *not* coming to faith.

Even though you answer them – they move no closer to God; they just raise *another* objection, *another* question, then *another, and another*, as though the abundance of questions is in itself ample support for their rejection of Christ.

This is the position the true agnostic takes.

The agnostic says that not only does he *not* believe, it's *impossible* to believe because it's impossible to *know*.

When the agnostic asks a question, he's not interested in discovering truth – only in proving his point that knowledge is unattainable.

He's a *skeptic*, so even when he is presented with proof, he dismisses it as only one person's perception or interpretation.

We've all met these people – they ask a question, and we answer it with what we know is absolute truth & proof, and it's as if they're deaf.

They just divert and ask another question.

If I've just described you – you're an *agnostic*, a *skeptic*. So realize that no amount of proof will persuade you because for you it's NOT about *wanting* to discover truth – but only to *reinforce your unbelief and rejection* of Christ.

Be honest with yourself – look inward at your *own* motives.

Ask yourself *why*, when your doubts are shown to be groundless and your questions are answered, you don't *really* listen, but just raise *another* objection.

I can say categorically that all the proof rests in favor of the gospel, in the claims of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, in the inspiration of Scripture and the truth of the Christian faith.

You don't need *more* proof, you need to *accept* the evidence you've already been given.

And with John, I urge you to do it *quickly!*

Every day you delay, every new time you resist and reject your heart becomes more and more hard and calloused to truth and to the prompting of the Spirit of God.

One more thing before we move on – the word used for *baptism* in this passage speaks of *full immersion*.

Among the Jews, there were several different forms of ritual cleansings, from washing feet, to elaborate practices of washing hands, to full baths in the ritual *mikvahs*.

But the word used for baptism in this chapter means *complete immersion*.

I mention this because different denominations practice different forms of baptism; from immersion to sprinkling.

Christian baptism, which finds its roots in what John began here, was a complete dunking.

John said -

11| indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Throughout his ministry, John was clear in his message that he was not the focal point but only a *forerunner*.

His mission was to prepare the way for the One who would come to do the Real Work.

He was keen to keep the eyes off of himself and onto the One to come.

In this, John provides us with a great example of what it means to be a minister – which we all are!

Our aim ought not to be to promote ourselves but to direct people to Jesus.

John said that his baptism was merely a sign of repentance; it was a way for people to take a step of identification with his call to repent.

Baptism *wasn't* repentance itself; just something the people could do as a kind of *down-payment* on their intention to turn from their sin to God.

But when the Messiah came, the baptism He would bring would be different.

He would immerse them in the Holy Spirit and fire.

These aren't meant to be understood as *two different things* but as the *same* thing – the Holy Spirit & fire!

Remember, John said they needed to repent BECAUSE the Kingdom of heaven was at hand.

When that Kingdom came, when the King came, the Messiah – then those who had genuinely repented would be found in a place to receive the Kingdom into their hearts.

Just as they had immersed themselves in water, Christ would immerse them in the person and power of the Spirit of God.

And this **HOLY** Spirit would *consume* the last dregs of sin they had repented of, while filling them with a holy zeal and passion for God.

It's crucial we grasp what John was saying--their response to his call to repentance, put them in the spiritual place to experience God coming to them in a deeply personal way.

Remember what the older prophets had said again and again to the people – “Return to Me, says the Lord, & I will return to you!”

“Repent, & I will send showers of blessing!”

We speak often about the *grace* of God and how He blesses us, not based on what we do, not what we earn, but on the basis of His own sovereign favor.

That's true – but it's equally true that to enjoy the *fullness* of God's grace, we must be in the place where it's being lavished & poured out.

You know how to enter that place? *By repentance!*

John's message was the same as all the prior prophets, of which he was the last.

Elijah had been the *first*, and he, reprising the *role* of Elijah, was the last.

And from beginning to end, the prophetic voice cried out – “Repent! That you may know the blessing of the Lord.”

Let's be honest, that seems so backward to us.

We think that by striving for holiness and piety we will enter God's favor.

Everything within us urges us to aim at trying to give God *reason* to like us and accept us.

We want to put God under an obligation to bless us because of how good we're doing.

And so, all too often our pursuit of holiness turns into a selfish, self-centered thing.

We want to puff out our chest and say – “Look how good I'm doing!”

That's precisely where the Pharisees were!

Where God wants us is in a place of continual repentance – **not** because we're always blowing it and so needing to ask forgiveness yet again, but in a place where we're not doing acts of holiness out of our own energy and attempts to put God under an obligation of blessing.

To repent means to turn from myself and my ways and to simply yearn for God.

If I'm holy, I won't really be conscious of it because I'll be so pre-occupied with the desire for more of God that I'll always and only see myself through His eyes!

John went on to speak of the Messiah's mission when He came -

12His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

John's point was this – “My message is only preparatory! I'm calling you to a baptism of water, a sign of your desire to be straight with God.”

“If you don't accept my message, then the One who comes after me, the One I've been sent as the forerunner of, then there's no way you'll be ready for Him and His work.”

“I only announce judgment – HE BRINGS IT!”

“If you reject my message, His will *consume* you.”

It was the teaching of the rabbis of that time that if Israel repented *perfectly* in one day, from the

humblest slave to the ruler on his throne, then the Messiah would come. [2]

John was giving voice to this expectation when he came saying that the Lord was ready to come – they must prepare by repenting.

The bulk of the common people did; it was only the leaders of the nation and religion who refused.

And it was these same resisters who proved such an obstacle to Jesus when He arrived.

B. The Baptism of Jesus 3:13-17

13Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. **14**And John *tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”* **15**But Jesus answered and said to him, **“Permit *it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*”** Then he allowed Him.

Though Matthew doesn't tell us, John & Jesus were cousins.

Their mothers had visited each other when both were pregnant and John had been born just a short time before Jesus.

There's a good chance the two men had spent time together as lads, playing & talking about the unique circumstances of their births and calling by God.

For sure there was something John knew about Jesus – He had no *need* to repent! And the baptism John was doing was one signifying repentance.

So when Jesus arrived at the place where John was working, and He came along to be dunked, John balked.

If anything – Jesus ought to be doing the dunking and John ought to be the one *getting* wet.

But Jesus urged John's consent to let it be as it was;

John's mission was to preach repentance and to baptize.

Jesus' mission was to *identify* with the people.

Though in Himself He was sinless, He came to *become sin*, and to take it to the cross where sin & death would be *undone*.

Being baptized, at the very outset of His mission would set Him on the right course and serve notice that He had come to identify fully with man.

16When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. **17**And suddenly a voice *came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

The other gospels tell us that this wasn't *just* something *Jesus* saw; the crowds heard and saw it as well.

While Jesus *voluntarily* took this step of identifying with sinful man, it was important that everyone understand that in Himself, *He was no sinner!*

His identification with sinners was so that He could *carry* sin to the cross and dispense with it, breaking its death-grip on the human race.

So the Father showed His *approval* of the Son by a manifestation of divine glory & affirmation.

Exactly what happened and how this glory was revealed isn't made clear – but we're left with the impression whatever it was, it was enough to impress everyone there that Jesus' baptism wasn't like anyone else who'd gotten dunked!

This is one of the very few times in Scripture that we find all three persons of the Trinity manifested at the same time and in the same place.

Notice that we see Jesus coming up out of the water, the Father speaking from heaven, and the Holy Spirit alighting upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

This one passage effectively annihilates the false doctrine called *modalism*, which says there is only one person in the Godhead who comes to man in different times in history in different '*modes*;' the *Father* in the OT, the *Son* in the gospels, and ever after as the *Spirit*.

Here at the Baptism of Jesus, we see all three Persons of the Godhead as *distinct*, and as arranged *locationally* so as to get across the idea they are *separate* Persons.

MATTHEW 4

C. The Temptation of Jesus 4:1-11

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Immediately after His baptism, which inaugurated His public ministry and identified Him with fallen man, Jesus went alone into the wilderness for the express purpose of being tempted by an evil spirit no less in rank than satan, “his-self”.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points, just as we are.

Here in Matthew 4, we read about the consummate experience of temptation.

If Jesus came to identify with man, with *every* man, then that means the temptations He endured were on an order of magnitude more fierce and appealing than anything we have ever known.

The basic motivations that made the temptations real, we experience, but because of Jesus’ potential as the Messiah, the offer was all the more enticing!

And, since He resisted them *all the way*, He knew the full-weight of them.

Think about it, who knows the power of temptation better, the one who yields or the one who resists?

The one who resists!

When you give in, the full weight of the temptation is never experienced – because you gave in!

The quicker you yield, the less of the power of the temptation you know.

The *longer* you resist, the greater the lure and enticement.

Jesus resisted *all the way* to the end and because of who He was, *the consummate man*, the appeal of the temptation was all that much stronger because of His potential!

But this is why Jesus came – to identify with man, fully!

What Adam had lost – Jesus came to reclaim – so it meant facing the devil’s best shots.

And why not face it right at the outset of His mission?

²And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

Those who fast as a regular discipline know that for most people, there’s a common pattern that occurs.

For the first 3-5 days without food, it’s agonizing.

Then the stomach registers it’s not going to get food and it stops sending hunger pains.

The metabolism switches over from burning food to burning the fat stores the body has saved from the excess calories it’s consumed.

Once the fat stores are depleted, depending on how much of it there is, then the body starts cannibalizing muscle. This usually happens at about the 25th to 35th day.

Then, once the muscles have been depleted of nutrients, body systems start to shut down and the body goes into a mode of preservation, keeping only the core systems working; the main organs.

If no food is given at this point, then between the 35th and 40th days, the body will start converting the other tissues into energy to keep the heart beating.

So when it says that Jesus was hungry after 40 days, it means that he was in fact at the point of virtual starvation.

If He doesn’t eat soon, He will die! And He knows it.

You see, Jesus had to come to this place of basic physical survival so that He could face one of man’s most fundamental challenges – to trust God for His very life!

³Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

⁴But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

The temptation here is subtle and we may miss it.

The devil challenged Jesus - **“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”**

Really, the word “if” ought to be translated as “Since.”

What the devil is saying is “Look, you’re about to die – and this is so needless – after all, You’re God. So, perform a miracle and turn these stones here into nice hot loaves of French Bread!”

Now, question: Why had Jesus just been baptized? And why was He out in the wilderness? Why was He allowing Himself to even *be* in the place of temptation?

TO IDENTIFY WITH – MAN!!!!!!!

Yet what identity does the devil appeal to in Jesus? His being God!

Dominion of Earth had been given to a man, had been lost by a man and could only be reclaimed by a man!

Jesus didn’t come in His role as Messiah to defeat Satan as God, but as the Perfect Man!

If Jesus had turned the stones into bread to satisfy his own needs, He would not have entrusted Himself into the hands and keeping of the Father as a man!

Adam had failed in eating – Jesus would not go there.

And He informed the devil that He would not be dealing with Him as God in His mission as the Messiah – but as a Man! So he said, *‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’*” Quoting Deut 8:3.

⁵Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

⁷Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”

For the 2nd temptation, satan brought Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem.

How this happened isn’t explained – we just read that they were in the wilderness one moment, and the next they were on the temple mount in Jerusalem.

Ephesians 2:2 says that the devil is *the prince of the power of the air*, and it seems he spiritually ‘transported’ the two of them to the pinnacle of the temple because this afforded a location to add weight to his next temptation.

The pinnacle of the temple was the corner on the roof of the temple where a priest would blow a trumpet each morning to announce the commencement of a new day of worship.

In the rubble left by the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 AD, they’ve found the stone which marked this place.

Engraved on the stone are the words – “The place of the sounding of the trumpet.”

The point is, as you looked down from this corner onto the temple grounds, you saw *thousands* of people both going up to the temple to worship or leaving it after having just gone there.

There was no place more crowded than the massive pavement that was right beneath the pinnacle of the temple.

Now catch the scene – Jesus is taken from the emptiness of the wilderness to what we would call the *very opposite* – the most crowded place – and He’s given the challenge to jump off and experience God’s rescue.

In rebuffing the first temptation, Jesus had responded with the Word of God, so the devil quotes Psalm 91 and says that God has promised to rescue Him.

Also, Jesus’ whole foundation in resisting the first temptation had been to entrust Himself to God. So the devil suggests He *really* prove His trust in God by sort of *daring* God. – take a *leap of faith* – literally!

The appeal was this – “Why are You out in the wilderness all by Your lonesome. You’re the Messiah, and the people have been waiting for You! Don’t take this humble and quiet route You’re taking. Go fulfill their desires and expectations! They want someone who will do the spectacular! If You fly down from the pinnacle onto the temple mount and come in for a safe landing, they will see it as a fulfillment of Your coming from the skies in glory! They’ll rally to You and You’ll have instant success!”

Jesus resisted the temptation by revealing the corrupt interpretation and application of Psalm 91 the devil had used.

God will *indeed* protect His own – but only as they faithfully follow His guidance and direction in their everyday lives – not when they put Him to a foolish test *just to prove who they are* – as Deut. 6:16 rightly teaches.

In this temptation, the devil was playing on a powerful motivation common in man – *the desire to be accepted*.

Remember that Jesus had just told him that He would take His role as the Messiah as a *Man*, not God.

So the devil said in effect – okay, here’s a temptation that will appeal to that specifically.

Jesus knew what the people wanted, what they were looking for.

If He came in power, performing great public miracles and staging spectacular displays they would flock to Him.

By pleasing them and their desire for seeing the miraculous, He could gain their acceptance.

But if He made Himself a pleaser of men, then He could no longer be a pleaser of God, because God’s agenda and man’s are not the same.

If you gain a crowd BY signs and wonders, then you have to keep them coming, and they have to become more and more spectacular, or boredom sets in.

What’s a miracle today becomes commonplace tomorrow.

Jesus did indeed perform miracles, but only as simple validations of His message and humble acts of compassion.

He *never* performed the miraculous just to wow the crowds – Never!

The miracles were always *secondary* – the *message* was the main thing.

So Jesus resisted this temptation too – He would not yield to the desire to be accepted by men if it would imperil His approval by the Father.

Round 3 -

⁸Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” [Deuteronomy 6:13]

This time it seems the devil took Jesus to a place that was *spiritual* as opposed to physical.

From a lofty vantage point, the entire panorama of human history was displayed before them, showing the heights to which human glory had risen – or would rise.

And once Jesus had feasted His eyes on it all, the devil then tried to set the hook – “Want it? All you have to do is align yourself under Me as the first man did – and I’ll give it all to you.”

The appeal the devil was using was a *shortcut* to why Jesus came in the first place.

Remember when God came to Adam and Eve after the Fall, He gave the promise of the Redeemer who would one day come to reclaim Mankind’s lost dominion – but in the act of crushing the devil’s head, His own heel would be wounded.

The devil here offers the Redeemer, the Promised One, a shortcut to the end: “Let’s forget all about that crushing and wounding thing and just each of us get what we’re after! I’ll turn dominion of humanity and earth over to You, and *You* turn Yourself over to *me!*”

Jesus replies – “No way, Jose! My worship and surrender goes to no one but the One to Whom it is due – God!”

He would indeed reclaim Man’s lost dominion, but not be surrendering to the devil – He would DEFEAT him and would do so by the Cross.

A couple more things to note here before we move on:

1) In 1 John 2, John divides all temptation into 3 categories: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. [v. 16]

We see in the 3 temptations of Jesus these 3 categories.

In the first was an appeal to *the lust of the flesh* – turn stones into bread.

In the second was *the pride of life* – gain acceptance by pleasing man!

In the third was *the lust of the eyes* – the devil showed him untold riches, glory and power.

2) How did Jesus deal with each of the three temptations; how did he resist them, what was His *weapon* in the spiritual battle he waged with the devil?

It was the Word of God! In response to each temptation, Jesus held up the truth of the Word of God. He took refuge in the Word!

And remember, He faced these temptations AS A MAN.

This ought to stand as a vital and important example to us of how *we* are to wage spiritual warfare and resist temptation – with Scripture.

And not just blindly quoted, but understood!

You see, even the devil knows scripture, as we see in the second temptation – but being the deceiver he is, he twists and distorts the truth and turns it into a lie. This is ever his method; to twist the truth.

Our defense is the Word of God, rightly interpreted and applied.

11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

The other gospels tell us that the devil left Him *until another time*.

He was ever on the prowl for another opportunity to sneak in and work havoc.

But Jesus was ever vigilant, just as we must be.

I wonder when the angels came if they didn't bring Him a catered meal from the kitchens of heaven.

D. The Initial Ministry of Jesus 4:12-25

1. The Place • 4:12-16

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.

13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: 16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.”

When Jesus returned from the wilderness, news reached Him that John had been arrested by Herod Antipas; this signaled a crackdown by the Romans on the revival of John and Jesus knew it would be best to move north into the region of Galilee where the Romans didn't exert such a tight control over the populace.

Galilee was a rich and fertile area that supported a huge population. According to the historian Josephus, who at one time had been its governor, as many as 3 million people lived in Galilee, many of them Gentiles who had settled in the area because of its rich soil and abundant trade.

Jesus moved His base of operations from his hometown of Nazareth where He'd grown up, to Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is really a lake.

This move seemed to serve as a kind of *surgical cut* that separated Him from His previous life of quiet anonymity into His new life of public exposure.

And Galilee was the perfect place for Him to begin, for not only was it a populous district,

Josephus says the Galileans were a unique breed. He wrote that,

“They were ever fond of innovations, and by nature disposed to changes, and delighted in seditions.”

He said they were ever ready to follow a leader and to begin an insurrection.

They were notoriously quick in temper and given to quarreling.

Yet when it came to issue of character they were the most honorable of men.

Said Josephus, “The Galileans have never been [without] of courage. . . . Cowardice was never a characteristic of the Galileans. . . . They were ever more anxious for honor than for gain.”^[3]

We really could not think of a better place for the Messiah to begin His work than Galilee at this very

point in history!

The Roman Empire had enforced the *Pax Romana* – the Roman peace, and had built an extensive road system that covered the ancient world.

Their garrisons & outposts ensured the safety of those who traveled along them.

The most important of these roads passed right through Galilee!

Roads linking Asia with Europe and Africa all passed right through here.

It was inevitable that the news of what happened in Galilee would be carried to the four corners of the Empire.

Though Galilee was a *Jewish province*, it was *surrounded* on all sides by *Gentiles*.

In fact, the word ‘Galilee’ comes from the word meaning “circle” because the region was *encircled* by Gentiles, and so it’s motto in v. 15 as *Galilee of the Gentiles*.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the role Galilee would play in the ministry of the Messiah in 9:1-2

2. The Message • 4:17

17From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”

This is the same message John had preached, but John meant its fulfillment in the coming of Jesus. Why then did Jesus preach the same thing?

First of all, Jesus wanted everyone to understand that His mission and message were *extensions* of John’s.

He *began* by preaching the same message, but it wouldn’t *end* there.

He would take the message and expand and fulfill it.

Second, when Jesus preached this message, it was even MORE true than when John preached it, because as the King, where Jesus was, the kingdom was.

When the King is standing in front of you and says, “The kingdom is at hand” guess what? IT IS!!! Right in front of you!

The Jews were looking for the Messiah to bring the Kingdom **TO** them.

When the Messiah came, He came to bring them **INTO** the Kingdom through faith in Him.

A kingdom is a “king’s domain.”

The Kingdom of God, or heaven, as Matthew says it, is where- ever God’s reigns.

While the Jews of Jesus’ day were looking for a *political* kingdom that would rule over *nations*, Jesus came to bring a *spiritual* kingdom that would rule over *hearts*.

3. The Team • 4:18-22

18And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. **19**Then He said to them, “**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.**” **20**They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him.

21Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son of Zebedee*, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, **22**and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Capernaum, where Jesus had centered His mission at this time was a fishing town, as were most of the cities and villages which crowded the lakeside near there.

As He went through the region, carrying on in the wake of John the Baptist, it wasn’t long before

He issued the call to some of the fishermen he found along the banks to become his disciples.

Now, a couple quick things.

It was the expected pattern for an itinerant rabbi, a teacher to gather a small band of hand-selected students who were called *disciples*.

When Jesus began to call these men to follow Him, He was making it crystal clear to everyone that He was coming to them as a teacher who would bring a flavor of teaching unlike anything they had heard before.

Then, when we read that Jesus just said, “Hey, follow me,” and they dropped what they were doing to become His disciples, we wonder what kind of personal charisma He must have had to pull this off.

Actually, Matthew is greatly abbreviating the story of their selection.

The other gospels tell us the story of using Peter’s boat as a pulpit and of telling him to lower his nets for a catch, and the miracle of the bursting nets when he did so.

John had been a disciple of John the Baptist prior to this and knew all about Jesus because John had told the younger John to go and follow Jesus.

But then Jesus had disappeared into the desert and John the Baptizer had been arrested so the younger John went home to Capernaum and back to his occupation as a fisherman.

Now that Jesus is officially beginning His public ministry, He makes a formal call on these men to lay down their careers and follow Him.

4. The Method & Initial Success • 4:23-25

23 **And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.**

In every city and village of Galilee there was a synagogue; which is the Jewish equivalent to the local church – and at that time, there was one synagogue per town where all the people worshiped.

It was the regular pattern to provide traveling rabbis an opportunity to teach, so whenever Jesus arrived in a city, He was invited to speak – and would do so.

Then, He would minister compassion on the sick and needy by healing them.

It doesn’t take long for news of the miraculous to spread, and pretty soon, people were HOPING Jesus would come to their city and speak in their synagogue.

24 **Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.**

Syria borders the Galilee on the Northeastern and the two regions were connected by a major highway, so it wasn't long till people were coming from there to see and hear the New teacher who had not only taken up where John the Baptist had left off, but was doing much more.

Soon the crowds had swelled and followed Him where ever He went.

25 **Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.**

Decapolis means “Ten-cities” and describes a region of 10 independent Greek cities on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

These cities were populated, not by Jews but by Gentiles, and yet they came to Jesus.

And He did not turn them away – He received them and spoke forth His message to all who would listen.

CONCLUSION

God’s offer of forgiveness and new life is for all who will listen, no matter what their background or past.

[1] *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume*. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

[2] *ibid*

[3] *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume*. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the

University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed.
Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.