



Lesson 28 / November 26, 2017

JESUS' BAPTISM & TEMPTATION

Matthew 3:13-4:11

Key Verse

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:16-17

Discussion Questions

1. How does John's baptism relate to repentance (Matt 3:1-12)?
2. What makes Jesus' baptism unique (Matt 3:13-17)?
3. What is the doctrine of the Trinity?
4. What parts of the Trinity confuse you? Does it frustrate you that God is in some ways mysterious and hard to understand?
5. Why do you suppose the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt 4:1-2)?
6. How does the devil tempt Jesus? How does Jesus resist? (Matt 4:3-11)
7. What parallels do you see between Jesus' temptation and the temptation of Adam and Eve (lesson 4) and the wilderness wandering (lesson 14)?
8. Why is it important for Jesus to be perfectly without sin?
9. Do you trust Jesus for your salvation?

Question 55: How many persons are there in the Godhead?

Short Answer: *There are three eternal persons in the one Godhead: the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*

Full Answer: *There are three eternal persons in the one Godhead: the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.*

Question 56: How does Jesus prove himself to be without sin?

Short Answer: *When tempted, Jesus perfectly obeys God.*

Full Answer: *When tempted, Jesus perfectly obeys God by faithfully observing God's word and resisting the devil's temptations to disobey, for Jesus is fully righteous and entirely without sin.*

Summary

Some moments in life become the defining moments that shape who we are and directly impact the course of our lives. Graduation. A first job. Getting married. The birth of a child. The death of a loved one. The diagnosis of a serious disease. In Matthew 3-4, we find two important defining moments in Jesus' life. First, Jesus is baptized and reveals his identity as the Son of God. Second, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and proves himself to be perfectly without sin.

First, in Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. John the Baptist has been out in the wilderness as the second Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6; cf. lesson 26), calling people to repent and be baptized in preparation for the coming of the Lord (Matthew 3:1-12). When John baptizes Jesus, strange things happen. The heavens open, the Spirit of God descends as a dove and rests on Jesus, and a voice from heaven says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus' baptism is no ordinary baptism of repentance. Instead, Jesus' baptism reveals Jesus to be the Son of God.

We have already learned in the Old Testament the very central teaching that the LORD is the one true and living God (Deut 6:5; lesson 12). But now the New Testament uses divine language to speak not only of the Father, but also of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and all three appear simultaneously alongside one another in the story of Jesus' baptism. We have one God but three divine beings. How can this be?

For nearly 2000 years now, the church has answered this difficult question with the doctrine of the Trinity. The word "Trinity" does not actually appear in Scripture, but it is a theological word that summarizes for us the Bible's teachings about the nature of God. The Trinity describes God as being one unified God but three distinct persons. All three are the same with regard to deity in that they all share fully in the one divine nature. Each person is fully the one God and not just a one-third piece of God. But at the same time, they are also distinct persons with unique personalities who can easily be distinguished from one another (as at Jesus' baptism). They are not merely three different forms God can take, or three different roles God can play, but they are three unique persons in one God, the blessed Trinity.

Does all of this confuse you? It should. Did you really expect the God of heaven to be so easily understood by our feeble minds? He is gloriously baffling and bafflingly glorious. Let us take care lest we should reduce the Triune God to a simplistic explanation we can more easily understand.

The second defining moment for Jesus is his temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). The Holy Spirit takes Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for forty days. Matthew records three specific temptations: the devil tempts Jesus to use his power to create bread, to test God by trying to destroy himself, and to worship the devil in exchange for the glory of the kingdoms of the earth. In short, the devil tempts Jesus to directly disobey the will of his Father, but Jesus successfully resists each temptation by quoting from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

If you think Jesus was not *really* tempted, since he is the Son of God, then consider that in fact Jesus experienced even greater temptation than we do precisely *because* Jesus never yielded to the temptation. When we fall to temptation, the temptation ends, but because Jesus never falls, his temptation continues. Therefore, he can sympathize with us in our weakness when we are tempted, for he truly has been tempted as we are in every way, yet he is without sin (Heb 4:15).

Jesus' temptation, therefore, proves Jesus to be perfectly obedient and without sin. Remember Genesis 3 (lesson 4) where the devil tempts Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and they disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit. And remember the book of Numbers (lesson 14) where God sends Israel into the wilderness for forty years because they continually test and disobey God. Jesus, however, succeeds where both Adam and Israel failed, for Jesus is entirely faithful in the face of temptation.

These moments define Jesus in very important ways. As the Son of God, Jesus is powerful to overcome sin and to conquer death. And because Jesus is perfectly without sin, he does not need to die for his own sins, and he is thereby able to die for the sins of others, namely our own. In short, our salvation could be accomplished by no one less than the perfect Son of God. His baptism and his temptation define Jesus as exactly the person we need to save us from sin and death. Let us, then, give thanks to the Triune God for his perfect Son, Jesus Christ.