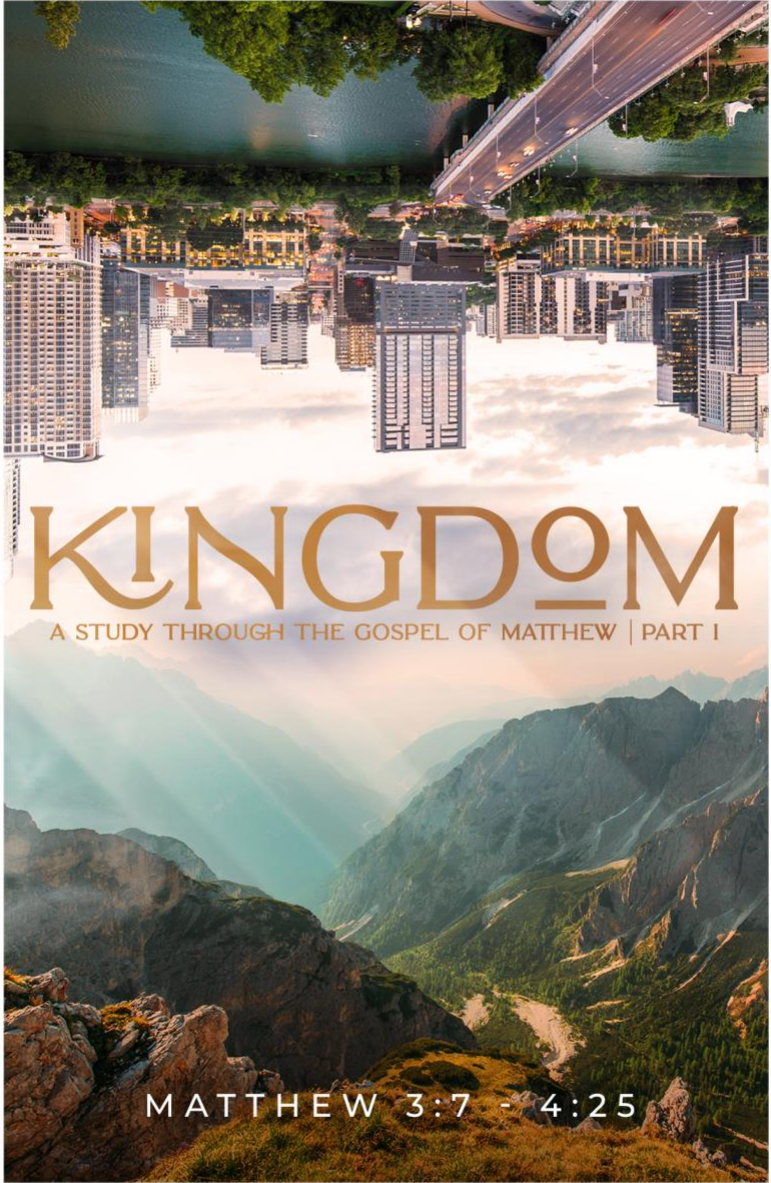




WORD TO LIFE

WEEKS 6-10

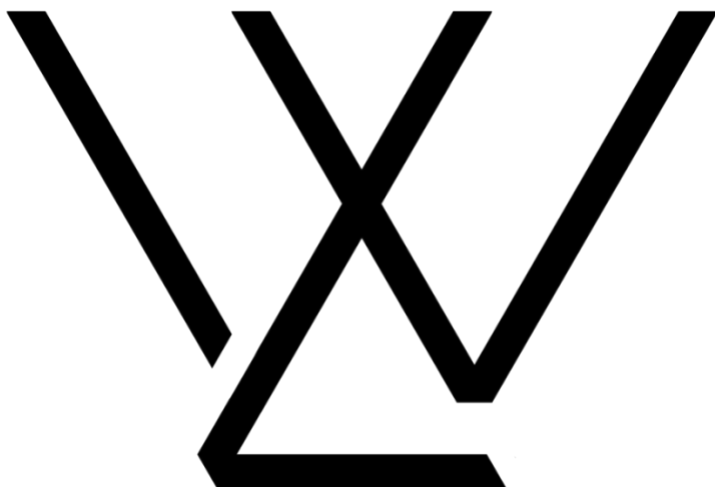


# KINGDOM

A STUDY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW | PART I

MATTHEW 3:7 - 4:25





**Word to Life's** are sermon-aligned study guides, created to help the church dive even deeper into the passages we study together on Sundays.

Each week there will be five studies to help you prepare for the upcoming weekend sermon. This will also be a great discussion tool at your next LifeGroup meeting.

We hope you enjoy and grow deeper in your faith!

### **Contributors**

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— WEEK 6 —

- FEB. 12
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## Week 6: Matthew 3:7-12

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 3:7-12

#### EXPLORE:

*Instructions*: Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity**: While reading, write down some observations in the space below.
- **Activity**: How many images or metaphors do you see John the Baptist use in the passage we are studying this week? List them below and what you notice about them.
- **Question**: Why do you think he called the Jewish leaders a *brood of vipers*? Where else do you read about snakes/serpents/vipers in Scripture?

- **Question:** How would you summarize v. 9 in your own words?
  
- **Question:** When is fire used in John's speech to the Pharisees and Sadducees? What do you notice about how it is used?
  
- **Question:** How would you summarize John's thoughts about Jesus based upon this passage?
  
- **Question:** What happens to the wheat and the chaff after they are threshed? In your own words, what does this image mean?



## **Week 6: Matthew 3:7-12**

### **Day 2: Religion vs. Relationship**

#### **READ: Matthew 3:7-12**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Early in the book of Matthew we are introduced to two religious groups that will appear often throughout the life and ministry of Jesus: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were a religious group that primarily functioned in local meeting places called synagogues. They added their own rules and interpretations to God's law. The Sadducees dealt more with activity in the Temple in Jerusalem. They generally held a high socio-economic status.

While there was much that these groups disagreed about, both relied on their Jewish heritage and religious rituals to secure their place with God. When they came to see John the Baptist preaching in the desert, he attacked that very notion. John told them that God could raise up sons of Abraham from the stones around them.

John's statement is simple, yet profound. It would be as foolish for a stone to brag about its location as it would for these religious leaders to brag about their lineage; neither of them did anything to merit where they were placed. In fact, the only thing they could take credit for was the sin that was so prevalent in their hearts.

Additionally, these groups thought that as long as they checked the right boxes of religious behavior, God would be pleased. They were far more concerned with their appearance of religious superiority than they were with the condition of their hearts. Because of this hypocrisy Jesus would later call them "white-

washed tombs.”<sup>1</sup> They were like fancy graves - pretty on the outside with nothing but death on the inside.

Too often we think we can impress God by checking the boxes of religious activity. We show up at a church service, sing the songs, put some money in the box and pat ourselves on the back for a job well done. “How proud God must be with us!” we think. Yet we give no real consideration to the condition of our heart, let alone cast the doors of it wide open and proclaim our desperate need for Him to make us new.

That is the problem with religion. It is simply about following a set of rules regardless of the state of your heart. But Jesus did not come to establish a religion, He came to offer a relationship. Religion is about what people do in an attempt to reach up to God. Jesus came to show us what God has done to reach down to us. Certainly, our actions have their place in our relationship with God. The Bible calls this fruit. John tells the religious leaders to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” He is calling them to actions that come from a heart that is given to God, focused on Him not self. The call is the same for us today. The good actions that come from us are the result of God working through us, not us trying to work our way to Him.

Ephesians 2:8-9 explains that God saves us by grace through faith. Salvation is not something we earn by what we do, it is a gift made possible by what Jesus has done. Verse 10 tells us that God has amazing things for us to do for Him as a result of being rescued by Him. We are not saved *by* good works; we are saved *for* good works.

**BIG IDEA: We are not saved *by* good works; we are saved *for* good works.**

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 23:27-28 for reference.

## **Week 6: Matthew 3:7-12**

### **Day 3: He Will Baptize You with the Holy Spirit and Fire**

**READ: Matthew 3:7-12 and Romans 8**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When you were baptized with water, you got wet. Your clothes, your hair, and the surface of your skin became soaked with water. But are you still wet today from that baptism? No, you quickly dried off. When you were baptized with the Holy Spirit, you didn't get wet with water. Instead, God placed a fire inside you that will never be extinguished. Whether that fire is currently a roaring bonfire or a smoldering wick, you have been burning with that fire to this day. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us faith to understand and believe the good news about Jesus. He resides in us and renovates us. He helps us in our weakness and reminds us that we are God's children.<sup>2</sup> As we live by the Spirit, we bear good fruit: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."*<sup>3</sup> The Spirit gives us talents and opportunities to advance God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus baptizes with fire. Just as the church was born when the Holy Spirit descended with tongues of fire upon the gathered disciples,<sup>4</sup> you were born again when the Holy Spirit moved into your life. Fire gives light. You can't see without light, and you can't truly grasp God's word without the Holy Spirit's illuminating flame. Fire provides warmth and comfort.

As a child, I (Jonathan) learned to ice-skate on a frozen lake up north. That winter, I played ice hockey on the lake every day after school. One day, my fingers got so cold that I couldn't even untie my ice-skates! My friend's dad had to help me. When I finally got

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<sup>2</sup> See Romans 8:16,26 for reference.

<sup>3</sup> See Galatians 5:22-25 for reference.

<sup>4</sup> See Acts 2:3-4 for reference.

home, my father had our wood stove roaring with heat. As I sat by the fire and sipped cocoa, my fingers thawed and my whole body was filled with warmth. In a similar way, the Holy Spirit thaws the coldness of our hearts and fills us with warmth and comfort from above. Fire purifies gold. Because you are more precious than gold to your heavenly Father, He sometimes uses fiery trials to purify you. In times of baptism by fire, remember this song:

“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.”<sup>5</sup>

Fire signifies an all-consuming passion. Do you have a burning desire to see God glorified? To see souls saved? To see broken lives restored? To devote yourself and your resources to God’s kingdom? These are passions worth your whole-hearted indulgence! Fire destroys. *“Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire... the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*<sup>6</sup> Jesus came as a lamb to die for the sins of the world, and he will return as a lion to judge the world. All who turn to Christ in repentance and faith are purified by fire, but all who ultimately reject Christ will be destroyed by fire.

**BIG IDEA: Since the Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence in your life, he enlightens, comforts, purifies, & consumes you.**

**APPLY:**

- **Questions:** What is baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire? What is one way this baptism has impacted you?

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<sup>5</sup> “How Firm a Foundation”

<sup>6</sup> See Matthew 3:10-12 for reference.

## **Week 6: Matthew 3:7-12**

### **Day 4: Preserved or Punished**

#### **READ: Matthew 3:7-12**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When you were a child, were you ever convinced that someone else deserved punishment only to receive it yourself? Maybe you thought your sibling needed some strong correction only to experience warranted correction yourself. Whether this occurred when you were a child or just acted like a child, the reality is that we can often see others as deserving of judgment while we remain self-righteously confident in ourselves. This was the scenario that was playing out before John the Baptist in Matthew 3.

The Jewish leaders thought that the Messiah would come in judgment only against the enemies of Israel. They believed that God would judge only those who did not adhere to the pharisaic understanding of moral perfectionism. Their behavior may have been modified, but their hearts were not inclined toward God. The wilderness preacher we have been studying had something to say about that!

In a method befitting a wilderness preacher, John the Baptist used snakes, fire, water, and the cutting down of a tree to make a simple, terrifying point abundantly clear. God will remove and punish evil. His judgment will come. A remnant will be preserved by His grace, while the wicked will experience punishment because of their unrighteousness.

Look again at the image that John used to speak about this judgment. *“His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

Parts of this metaphor might be foreign or unfamiliar to us, but they would not have been for John's audience. A winnowing fork would have been used to toss wheat and other lesser grains into the air. At the same time, the wind would blow separating the heavier high-quality grain from what was called the chaff. The quality grain would be collected, and the chaff would be destroyed.

It is no accident that John used this metaphor and the image of fire more than once when speaking to the Jewish leaders. God would come like a fire which both purifies the righteous who have placed their faith in Christ and punishes those who have not entrusted their lives to the Lord. Just as the wheat was separated from the chaff which needed to be removed, God's judgment also functions to remove evil.

In Matthew, God's judgement is described as both an unquenchable fire and an outer darkness, begging the question, "How can it be both?"<sup>7</sup> The simple, but terrifying answer is that the biblical text uses vivid imagery to depict the horrifying reality of eternal separation from God.

**BIG IDEA: God will preserve the righteous and wickedness will be punished.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How would your life change if you were increasingly aware of God's holiness and His justified judgment?

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<sup>7</sup> See Matthew 8:12 for reference.

## **Week 6: Matthew 3:7-12**

### **Day 5: Converts vs Conman**

**READ TOGETHER: Matthew 7:22-23, Matthew 11:11, John 8:44-47**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional time. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

“You cannot judge a book by its cover.” This popular saying rings true in our passage. The Pharisees and Sadducees were known by the public in Israel as religiously devout men. They dressed the part and acted the part. John the Baptist wore a garment of camel’s hair and ate locusts and honey. He, too, was known as a religiously devout man. However, all these men believed and taught different things. Who was right? How could the people judge who was righteous and who was fraudulent?

John the Baptist gave the people of Israel a great way to test who was a true convert and who was a conman. As he was baptizing, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to see what all the buzz was about. They were in for a rude awakening! When John saw them, he called them a brood of vipers. They appeared to be religious, but they were venomous and poisonous, full of malice and enmity. The wrath of God was going to come upon them unless they repented. The test John the Baptist gives us to determine whether someone is a convert or a conman is to look at the fruit they bear. Those who do not bear godly fruit will be like unproductive trees, cut down and thrown into the fire, only good for burning.

John the Baptist, on the other hand, shows us the character and fruit of a convert. He was humble and deferred to the mighty power of God. John was a great man, but he recognized that he was not even worthy to be a servant of Jesus, carrying his sandals. John was a natural man who baptized with water, but Jesus is from heaven, and He baptizes with the Holy Spirit. John pointed out that Jesus will separate the convert from the conman. He has a winnowing fork which He will use to separate the wheat – the true converts – from the chaff – the false ones.

We cannot hide behind our outward appearances, for God looks at the heart.<sup>8</sup> This means that we cannot assume we are right with God just because we grew up in a religious home or because we go to church every Sunday. These are outward signs. God looks in our heart to see if our love for Him is genuine. A genuine convert is truly holy, while a conman only has the appearance of godliness.

**BIG IDEA: A true convert bears godly fruit while a conman only pretends to do so.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Make a list of fruits that a true Christian possesses.
  
- **Activities:** Make a list of activities that a conman takes part in.

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<sup>8</sup> See I Samuel 16:7 for reference.



## Week 7: Matthew 3:13-17

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 3:13-17

#### EXPLORE:

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Questions:** Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. Using a physical or online resource, when is the Jordan River referenced in Scripture? Why might it be significant?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Questions:** What was John's reaction to Jesus coming for baptism? Why do you think John responded in that manner toward Jesus?

- **Activity:** What happened after Jesus was baptized? List as many things as you can notice.
  
- **Question:** Jesus answered, *“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* What do you think it means to *“fulfill all righteousness?”*
  
- **Question:** Although the word “Trinity” does not occur in Scripture, this passage has been foundational throughout Christian history for Trinitarian theology. Where do you see the Trinity in this text and why might it be significant?

## **Week 7: Matthew 3:13-17**

### **Day 2: Why did Jesus Participate in John's Baptism of Repentance?**

**READ: Matthew 3:13-17; 5:17-18; Isaiah 40:3; John 1:29-34 and Luke 9:35**

#### **EXPLORE:**

John's baptism was one of calling people to change their minds about sin and their attitude toward God, resulting in a change of behavior, that brings forth fruit in keeping with repentance. Since Jesus was sinless and had no behaviors or thought processes that would disqualify Him from God's kingdom, He had no reason to repent. Why then, did He come to be baptized by John? Jesus told John it was necessary to fulfill all righteousness. John declared in John 1:29-34 that the One who had sent him to baptize with water, said to him, *"He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."*

Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who came to John with a pretense of righteousness, Jesus was already righteous and without sin. Jesus' baptism publicly identified Him as God's beloved Son who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. John's baptism was an outward display, whereas the baptism Jesus sends is an inward work of God's grace. John's purpose in baptizing Jesus was for the purpose of revealing the Messiah to Israel as the awaited Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. When the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and rested on Him, God's voice declared, *"Behold, this is My beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased."* Luke records, *"This is My Son, My chosen One; listen to Him!"* Thus, Jesus' earthly ministry began and Isaiah 42:1 was fulfilled, *"Behold, My Servant Whom I uphold, My chosen in Whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him."*

Jesus fulfilled all the work the Father had given Him to do. His life was a testimony of obedience to the Father. Jesus identified with us in life, taking the form of our kinsman redeemer in a flesh and blood body, becoming our sacrifice for sin. In His death, He satisfied the wrath of God and in His bodily resurrection, God intended for Christ to impart His Holy Spirit to all who will believe. At the same time, His winnowing fork will one day separate God's children from the unrepentant ones. Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth and He alone knows the ones who are spiritually alive in Him.

**BIG IDEA: Recognize Jesus as both Lord and Savior.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Does your life bear fruit that reflects an authentic repentant and believing heart?

## **Week 7: Matthew 3:13-17**

### **Day 3: Righteousness Fulfilled by Jesus**

**READ: Matthew 3:13-17**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In this study, we have seen John the Baptist's hesitancy to baptize Jesus, and understandably so! However, Jesus changed the baptizer's mind through a simple explanation about why he must be baptized by Him. What is the explanation Jesus gives? Verse 15 tells us. *"But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented."* (v15).

The question arises, then, what does it mean that the baptism of Jesus would be required for Him *"to fulfill all righteousness?"* When considering this question, two things can help us understand the theologically rich and soul comforting truths presented in Jesus's baptism- the way in which Jesus identifies with sinful man and the shelter Jesus provides to repentant sinners.

First, Jesus's baptism led to the fulfillment of all righteousness as Jesus identifies with sinful man through His baptism. Baptism, presented in the New Testament, is paired with repentance of sins. Sinners get baptized to show they have turned from sin towards God and received the forgiveness of sins. However, this passage presents Jesus, the perfect Son of God, asking a sinner to baptize Him. Though Jesus had no sin to repent of, He humbled Himself by identifying with the people He came to save. Jesus would not wait until the cross to be "numbered with the transgressors<sup>9</sup>," but would mark the start of His ministry by being numbered with them through standing in the place of sinful man in His baptism.

Secondly, the baptism of Jesus provides shelter to repentant sinners and therefore was *"necessary to fulfill all righteousness."* It is worth noting that Jesus was baptized before His public ministry began. Jesus's baptism would mark the start of healings, the Gospel being preached to the poor, the dead being raised, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, all for the glory of God. The favor and love of the Father, however, would

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<sup>9</sup> See Isaiah 53:12 for reference.

not come later but rather would cover the Son at His baptism. Jesus's baptism is a demonstration of Christ's love for sinners and a call for those who have no righteousness of their own to be sheltered under the very righteousness of Jesus.

Jesus shows His commitment to love you not only at the cross, but also at His baptism by identifying with sinful man. Are there any ways which you have chosen to not show your identification with Jesus (i.e., hiding your faith, not taking opportunities to share Jesus with others, etc.)? Ask God for His grace and Holy Spirit-enabled boldness.

Is there any righteousness of your own which you are trusting in to win favor with God or others? Rest in the righteousness of Jesus which He has credited to you, not because of anything you have done but only because of His work on your behalf.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus loves you enough to fulfill all righteousness. This is clear in His baptism and throughout His life.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** If Jesus has fulfilled all righteousness, how does this help give you spiritual rest?
  
- **Activity:** Because of Jesus alone, God has credited you with the very righteousness of His Son by grace through faith. Pray that God would help you fully identify with Christ and count everything else as loss. Pray that God would help you rest in His righteousness, so you no longer fear remaining in His favor.

## **Week 7: Matthew 3:13-17**

### **Day 4: The Beloved Son**

**READ: Matthew 3:16-17; 17:5**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Verses 16 and 17 of this chapter not only provide textual support for the trinitarian concept, but also give us a glimpse into the purpose and identity of all three persons of God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Three persons; one essence. Three who's; one what.

God the Father is revealed through a voice out of heaven. He speaks audibly only three times in the New Testament: here at Jesus' baptism,<sup>10</sup> at the transfiguration,<sup>11</sup> and right before the crucifixion.<sup>12</sup> What He says speaks volumes, "*This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.*" Please note the adjective. The Father purposefully and intentionally inserts this description: beloved. This is something that the devil leaves out just three verses from this one when he taunts Jesus saying, "*If you are the son of God.*"<sup>13</sup> In the battle of good and evil, the spiritual warriors that are against God are strategic, cunning, and manipulative. They know that if they can get you to doubt that your heavenly Father loves you, then they will get a foothold. This is an attack on your identity. Don't fall for it. Only your creator can define you.

God the Son, Jesus of Nazareth or Jesus Christ, was praying when the heavens opened up which revealed the close, communicative, and personal relationship in and among the members of the trinity.<sup>14</sup> This baptism was distinct from any other in that it signaled the commencement of Jesus' messianic ministry. It was not a baptism of repentance, but of obedience, and because of His obedience unto death, we too have an opportunity to have a personal relationship with

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<sup>10</sup> See Matthew 3:17 for reference.

<sup>11</sup> See Matthew 17:5 for reference.

<sup>12</sup> See John 12:28 for reference.

<sup>13</sup> See Matthew 4:3 for reference.

<sup>14</sup> See Luke 3:21 for reference.

the triune God. Jesus is the eternal Son and we are adopted sons and daughters. He acknowledged and embraced His identity as the beloved Son which allowed Him to trust the Father's will in all things. He knew who He was and whose He was, and because Jesus was confident in His identity, He fulfilled His purpose. We too have a purpose because we have been given a new identity. We are citizens of heaven, God's temple, redeemed and seated in the heavenlies.<sup>15</sup> Let these truths sink in and lead you in your daily decisions.

God the Holy Spirit is depicted here as, "*descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.*" The anointing of the Holy Spirit was few and far between until after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Even when it did happen, there was no guarantee for how long a person would be anointed.<sup>16</sup> So, at this point in time, the Spirit resting on someone was unique which further confirmed that Jesus was someone special. The third person of the trinity also knows His purpose and identity. The Holy Spirit brings power. The Holy Spirit brings anointing. The Holy Spirit brings life. If you are a born-again follower of Jesus then the Holy Spirit also rests in you. You too have power, anointing, and new life through Him. The description in verses 16-17 is one of unity in the trinity. The baptism of Jesus shows us the foundational significance of identity and purpose. It is important we know who God is and therefore who we are.

## **BIG IDEA: Purpose and Identity Shape our Lives**

### **APPLY:**

- **Question:** Do you think everyone heard the voice from heaven? (see Jn 12:29)
- **Challenge:** Write out your identity statement. How would you define who you are? Does this match what God says about you?

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<sup>15</sup> See I Corinthians 3:16, Colossians 1:13, Philippians 3:20, and Ephesians 2:6 for reference.

<sup>16</sup> See I Samuel 16:14 and Judges 16:20 for reference.



## **Week 7: Matthew 3:13-17**

### **Day 5: The Baptism of Jesus**

**READ TOGETHER: Genesis 1:2, Isaiah 11:2, Deuteronomy 4:12**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

The people of Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding region of the Jordan all came out to hear John and be baptized by him. Then came the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now, last but certainly not least, Jesus comes out to the Jordan to be baptized by John. What an honor this would be for John! We also see how it was at first confusing for him. By coming out to be baptized by John, Jesus is beginning his earthly ministry. This is his first “public” appearance, and it does not take place in the temple. It takes place in the wilderness and at the river Jordan. This demonstrates for us that John’s baptism was approved by God, for even His own Son would receive it.

John humbly recognized that he needed to be baptized by Jesus. He needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit just like any other man. He was a sinner like others and Jesus was sinless. Jesus said to let it be so for now. He did not disagree that John needed his baptism but at this time Jesus needed John’s baptism to fulfill all righteousness. John’s baptism was approved by God as we have already seen. As an Israelite and being born in the likeness of men, Jesus understood that He also needed to be baptized. Jesus was baptized not because He was a sinner, but so that He could

stand as a substitute for sinners. Jesus participated in every sacrament that He gave us, first in baptism and then in the Lord's Supper.

A special sign from heaven accompanied Jesus' baptism – the heavens were opened. This is because He came from heaven and was going back to heaven after his work was complete on earth. And the Spirit of God, like a dove, came to rest on Him. This should remind us of the Genesis account. *The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters* like a dove. Now, the dove is hovering over baptismal waters of Jesus and resting upon Him. God is doing a new creation, and it comes through His Son. The voice from heaven should remind us of the giving of the Law. The people heard the voice of God from the fire but saw no figure or appearance of God. Once again, the people of Israel hear a voice but see no form of God. All they hear are the words, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* This is God's only Son and there is no displeasure in Him. With such a great sign, no man should have any displeasure in Jesus, but should warmly embrace Him just as the Father does. If Jesus is well pleasing to us, then we will be well pleasing to God the Father.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus' baptism is surprising but also a clear way for us to see the Triune God.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** How does Jesus' baptism parallel to the story of Israel?
- **Question:** How might you explain the Trinity to someone using this passage?

## Week 8: Matthew 4:1-11

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 4:1-11

#### EXPLORE:

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Questions:** Based on v. 1, how was Jesus led into the wilderness? Why might this be a significant detail?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** Jesus was there 40 days and 40 nights. Using an online or physical resource, where else have we seen 40 in Scripture?

- **Question:** In what ways did the devil tempt Jesus according to Matthew 4:1-11?
  
- **Question:** What do you notice about how Jesus resisted the temptation of the devil?
  
- **Question:** Jesus was sinless and yet experienced temptation. How would that truth change how we encounter temptation ourselves?
  
- **Question:** How have you learned to resist temptation in your life? (*Note: This might be a good question and answer to share with your small group.*)
  
- **Question:** After the temptation was finished, what happened?

## **Week 8: Matthew 4:1-11**

### **Day 2: The Failures of Early Israel and the Triumph of Christ**

#### **READ: Matthew 4:1-11**

#### **EXPLORE:**

In Mathew 4, Christ is led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for 40 days and 40 nights He is tempted 3 times by the devil. Looking at Israel's exodus from Egypt and wanderings in the wilderness we can see parallels between Israel's failures on the way to the promised land and contrast these with Christ successfully navigating temptation and allowing all access to eternal life through his sacrifice on the cross.

The first temptation we see is in Matthew 4:3-4. Jesus has the power to turn the stones to loaves of bread to abate his hunger, however He rebuffs the devil saying, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* This can be paralleled by the account from Numbers 20, where Israel is without water. The Lord commands Moses and Aaron to tell the rock to yield water for the people and livestock to drink. Moses disobeys the Lord's word and instead strikes the rock with the staff instead of simply telling it. For this disobedience Moses is told by God that he will not lead the people to the promised land.

The second temptation of the devil in Matthew 4:5-7, is that Jesus should test God by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple. The devil even cites Scripture to Jesus. However, Jesus again rebukes the Devil saying, *"It is written, 'you shall not put the Lord your God to the test'".* I believe this temptation parallels the spies misreporting the status of the Land of Caanan in Numbers 13 and 14. God has promised this Land to Israel, but out of fear they deliver a bad report after 40 days in the land of Canaan, and the people lament *"'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or that we had died in this wilderness!'"* They did not have faith that the Lord would deliver on His promise and tested Him by working to elect a leader to go back to Egypt. This would not only deny them access to the promised land, but also undo God's work to release His people from slavery in Egypt. God punished the unfaithful

by barring all the men of Israel except Caleb and Joshua from entering the promised land.

The last temptation by the devil in the wilderness is written in Matthew 4:8-10, that the devil would give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He worshiped him. Jesus rebuked him saying *"You shall worship the Lord your God and only him shall you serve."* This parallels the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. Moses is on top of Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights. While Moses is away Aaron creates the Golden Calf and the people of Israel begin to make burnt offerings to it.

We can see that Christ succeeds against these temptations where Israel in the wilderness failed. For their failure many of the people of Israel were denied a chance to dwell in the land God had promised them. We can overcome the wages of sin and death through Christ's success in navigating the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus' sinless life and His sacrifice on the cross.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus' Temptations are Reminiscent of Trials and Failures of Early Israel on the way to the Promise Land.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How can we use Jesus' reaction to temptation as a template for temptations we face in our own lives?
  
- **Question:** Often when reading the New Testament passages context or understanding of the Old Testament is helpful. What are some examples where an Old Testament passage illuminated something you were reading in the New Testament?

## **Week 8: Matthew 4:1-11**

### **Day 3: Who was the tempter in the wilderness with Jesus?**

**READ: Matthew 4:1-11**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Why was Jesus led into temptation? Why did the Spirit lead Jesus to be tempted by the devil? James teaches us that *God tempts no one, but that each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*<sup>17</sup> Our God does not put the evil desires and the pride of life within us. However, He orders our steps and allows the devil to test us for the purpose of proving the genuineness of our faith.<sup>18</sup>

So, who is this devil that God allows to test our faith? First called Lucifer, Star of the Morning, he was the anointed covering cherub. He was blameless until unrighteousness was found in him and he sinned. He was full of pride and it corrupted his wisdom.<sup>19</sup> At some point in time, Lucifer fell from heaven and is experienced on earth in the form of a serpent. As punishment for tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden, he was made to crawl on his belly and eat dust, in contrast with the exalted position he once flaunted.<sup>20</sup> He is called the prince of demons, the father and author of lies. He is our adversary (Satan) who provokes us to fret over our circumstances, doubting the goodness of God. He is a blasphemer of God's name. He is the daily accuser, laying to our charge laws we are guilty of breaking and demanding our punishment.

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<sup>17</sup> See James 1:13-15; Ezekiel 16:48-51, and Proverbs 16:18-20 for reference.

<sup>18</sup> Consult the book of Job for reference.

<sup>19</sup> See Ezekiel 28:5-17 for reference.

<sup>20</sup> See Genesis 3 for reference.

The devil is the slanderer, backbiter, defamer, false accuser, unjust criticizer who seeks to hurt, defame, and malign, severing and destroying relationships.<sup>21</sup> Without a doubt, he does nothing without God's permission. He is not all-powerful and does he have his own rogue authority. The serpent's future has been sealed and is written in the final pages of the Bible. That ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, will deceive for a final time but the victory of Jesus is complete, and his power will come to an end.<sup>22</sup> At this time, the tempter will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

We all have fallen short of God's glory. We all have succumbed to temptation as old as the garden. We have all given in to pride, become slaves to sin, and found ourselves in opposition to God's good design. Praise be to God, the Scriptures are clear. God is both the judge and the justifier. He has made a way through faith in the sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection of Christ to be made clean and to be reconciled with God. Hallelujah, God is our just judge who, in Christ, has taken up our defense.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus won the victory over sin and the devil, for us**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** In what ways are you most consistently experiencing temptation? List them below and then prayerfully read Matthew 6:9-13 and 1 John 2:16-17.

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<sup>21</sup> See 1 Sam 1:6; Psalm 74:10; Revelation 12:10; Zechariah 3:1; Job 1:6, 9:15, 31:35 for reference.

<sup>22</sup> See Ezekiel 28:17; Genesis 3; Ezekiel 27:36, 28:19 for reference.



## **Week 8: Matthew 4:1-11**

### **Day 4: Faith and God's Word**

#### **READ: Matthew 4:4-10**

#### **EXPLORE:**

God's word is alive and active. It has the power to rebuke, teach, correct, and train.<sup>23</sup> Like all things powerful, it needs to be handled with caution and the utmost care. This section of Scripture describes Jesus using the Word of God to combat temptation, and the devil using the Word of God to deceive and ensnare his mark. The devil takes the text out of the context in which it was written, thereby distorting the truth and meaning of God's word. This is a dangerous practice and one we should be watchful for.

About five years ago, I (Cean) was helping set up for a church function and pizzas were ordered for all the volunteers. Unfortunately, they all had meat on them and since I am a vegetarian, I did not partake. When I was questioned about this, I answered honestly and was met with a paraphrase from Acts 10, "*God told Peter to kill and eat.*" I was honestly taken aback because the text was so far from the context of the situation we were in, I couldn't even comprehend what had happened. Knowing Scripture is one thing (knowledge), but properly applying it is what matters (wisdom).

It is a frightening thought that evil ones can recite the Word of God better than most of us! They not only know the Word of God, but the epistle of James also tells us that demons believe in God.<sup>24</sup> How can we reconcile this to our concept of faith? Doesn't Acts 16:31 say, if we believe in Jesus, we will be saved? The great Protestant Reformers distinguished between the various aspects of belief or faith which I find very helpful. These terms come from the Latin and aim to clarify the components of true saving faith.

The first aspect or level of faith is called 'notitia' which is the basic knowledge or content of a subject. This is information and takes place in

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<sup>23</sup> See Hebrews 4:12 and 2 Timothy 3:16 for reference.

<sup>24</sup> See James 2:19 for reference.

your mind. After all, we need to know something about who or what we are placing our faith in.

The second aspect or level of faith is called 'assensus' which is the intellectual assent from just receiving the facts to accepting them. This is understanding and takes place in your mind as well. We know about it and we have affirmed it. Millions of people know something about Christianity, but do not believe it is true. This is where demons are on the belief scale, and also where they attack us by trying to sow doubt (did God really say... Gen 3:1).

The third and final aspect or level of faith is called 'fiducia' which is personal trust and commitment to the accepted information. This is application and takes place in your heart. It is more than affirming the truth; it means entrusting oneself into the hands of Jesus. This is saving faith, and it is 100% God's doing. Demons affirm the truth of God, but do not personally trust Him alone for salvation. Saving faith is through grace alone and only through the Holy Spirit are we regenerated from death to life.

Learning and studying are extremely important things to do, but we must be diligent to get God's word from our heads to our hearts. If we don't, we are like the Pharisees and demons, and we have been called to be so much more!

**BIG IDEA: Love God with all of your Mind and your Heart.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** How have you seen someone misuse the Word of God? Did you correct them? Why or why not?
  
- **Question:** Are you holding onto something that is preventing you from drawing closer to Jesus?
  
- **Activity:** Write out Ephesians 2:8.

## **Week 8: Matthew 4:1-11**

### **Day 5: The Temptation of Jesus**

**READ TOGETHER: Hebrews 4:15, Deuteronomy 8:3,  
Deuteronomy 6:16, Deuteronomy 10:20**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

The Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus at His baptism. Now the Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus must defeat Satan early on in His ministry and at the end of His earthly ministry. We should read this as warfare, a great dual between two important figures. This great dual took place in the wilderness, probably in the wilderness of Sinai, where Moses and Elijah fasted forty days.

After fasting, Jesus was hungry. He was physically weak, but spiritually strong. In the weakness of His flesh that is when Satan seized upon the opportunity for his first temptation. At first glance it seems innocuous enough. *If you are the Son of God command these stones to become loaves of bread.* But notice that Satan begins by saying “if” you are the Son of God. Immediately Satan tempts Jesus to doubt His identity and the sign from heaven that He just received at His baptism. Satan wanted to Jesus to doubt the Father’s word and His goodness. Jesus trusted that the Father would provide Him food at the proper time and that *man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*

The second temptation took place at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus allowed Satan to lead Him there so that there could be no doubt that Satan did his worst and Christ still came out victorious. Here Satan tempts Jesus to presume upon the Father's protection. Satan twists the Scripture to try and persuade Jesus that He can do whatever He wants, and the angels must protect Him. Think of how sinister this temptation is. Satan wants Jesus to commit suicide but tries to deceive Him that the angels must stop Him from getting hurt. Jesus did not live to do His own will but only the will of His Father. Jesus understood that this would be putting God to the test, which is a violation of His holy will.

The final temptation was the darkest. Here Satan falsely offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world, which were already rightly His by inheritance, if Jesus would only bow down and worship him. Jesus quickly rebukes Jesus and lets him know that worship belongs to God alone. Satan did have to retreat as a defeated foe after this first clash in the wilderness. There was nothing more he could do. He had taken his best shot and Jesus proved to be holy and obedient to God.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus conquers Satan in the wilderness by the written word of God.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Activity:** Describe how these temptations are the same ones that are used today against man.
- **Question:** How do you think the angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation?

## **Week 9: Matthew 4:12-17**

### **Day 1: A Day to Explore**

#### **READ: Matthew 4:12-17**

#### **EXPLORE:**

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Questions:** A few times in our study of Matthew we have encountered the word fulfilled.
  - How often does this word occur in Matthew's gospel account?
  
  
  
  - Why do you think that Matthew speaks so often about how Christ fulfilled what was prophesied?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** Isaiah's prophecy references how a people in great darkness have seen a great light. When and how has the great light of Christ broken through the darkness in your life?

- **Question:** Jesus' preaching was summarized in a simple sentence. What was it?
  
- **Question:** What does it mean to repent? When was the last time you repented?
  
- **Question and Activity:** The biblical text reads, "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" What do you think that means? In your own words summarize what was Jesus saying.
  
- **Question:** Is your life lived as though the kingdom of heaven has come near? Why or why not?

## **Week 9: Matthew 4:12-17**

### **Day 2: Galilee of the Gentiles**

**READ: Matthew 4:12-17**

#### **EXPLORE:**

The modes of transportation available in Jesus' day seemed to be pretty limited. You had your boats, your beasts of burden, and, very occasionally, your Ethiopian chariots. But most of the time, if you were a commoner and you had somewhere to be, you only had one option: you walked. As we read through Matthew, we'll see that Jesus and his disciples did, in fact, do a whole lot of walking.

Case in point, today's passage states that, following the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus "withdrew into Galilee," and that "leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea."<sup>25</sup> We read earlier in the Gospel<sup>26</sup> that Mary and Joseph had moved *to* the town of Nazareth after returning from Egypt, so this passage marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry as he departs *from* his home town of Nazareth.

Most of Jesus' early ministry would take place in Galilee, which was the northernmost region that made up the province of Palestine. A visual aid can be helpful when trying to understand the geography of Jesus' ministry; I recommend checking the back of your Bible to see if it includes any relevant maps. Galilee was a tract about fifty miles east-to-west, from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea, and about twenty-five miles north-to-south, from Mt. Hermon to the Carmel and Gilboa mountain ridges. Despite being generally looked down upon, the people of Galilee would have the opportunity to witness more of Jesus' miracles

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<sup>25</sup> Extract from Matthew 4:12-13.

<sup>26</sup> See Matthew 2:22-24 for reference.

and teaching than the southern two Palestinian regions combined.<sup>27</sup>

Nazareth and Capernaum were both within the region of Galilee. When Matthew wrote “withdrew into Galilee,” he likely meant that Jesus withdrew *further* into Galilee, away from Jerusalem. Nazareth was located only a few miles south of Sepphoris, the Galilean administrative capital, which were both about half-way between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Capernaum was located on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee, west of the Jordan River, and would have been about twenty miles north-east of Nazareth. Capernaum, where Jesus called many of his disciples, including Matthew himself, would become Jesus’ home and base of operations for the remainder of his earthly ministry. As we’ll read in the coming weeks, the people of Capernaum would have a proximity to Jesus unlike any other, but despite being first-hand witnesses to his powerful miracles and authoritative teaching, Jesus stated clearly<sup>28</sup> that the cities of the northern Sea of Galilee—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and yes, Capernaum—remained unrepentant to the end.

**BIG IDEA: Christ’s early ministry was anchored in the city of Capernaum, in his home region of Galilee.**

**APPLY:**

- **Question:** Where is your Christian ministry anchored? What would it look like for your neighborhood to be your center of ministry?

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<sup>27</sup> Unger’s Bible Dictionary 1988 edition, entries on *Galilean, Galilee*.

<sup>28</sup> See Matthew 11:20-24 for reference.



## Week 9: Matthew 4:12-17

### Day 3: Sunrise

READ: Matthew 4:12-17, Luke 1:76-79, and Malachi 4:2

#### EXPLORE:

There's nothing quite like sitting on the edge of a sandy beach or at a picturesque overlook high in the mountains and watching a sunrise. As the night sky gives way to streaks of red, purple, and orange breaking over the horizon, you can't help but marvel at the beauty of God's creation. A daily transformation that, in a small way, reflects the all-encompassing impact of God's first recorded decree in Genesis 1:3, "*Let there be light.*"

In the early verses of Genesis, the first light of creation is contrasted with the darkness it overcomes, establishing a theme of light and darkness that is carried throughout the rest of Scripture. And because God's presence is often equated with light<sup>29</sup>, it should come as no surprise that the Gospel writers draw heavily on this imagery when describing Jesus' birth and the beginning of his ministry.<sup>30</sup> Matthew is doing just that in verses 16 and 17 when he highlights Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of the dawning light prophesied in Isaiah 9:1-2. Jesus' arrival is a powerful light breaking into a dark world, but it's also a gracious gift from God. Humanity never willed Jesus into being or earned on our own merit the atoning sacrifice of his death, any more than we control the rising of the sun each day. Rather it was God, who so loved the world that he, on his own accord, graciously gave his only Son for us — the "*light of the world*" so that we might have the "*light of life*".<sup>31</sup>

This gift is all the more striking when we consider our condition as recipients. While darkness can be described as "the absence of light", scripture uses the word to communicate something much more ominous. Darkness is not just the absence of something

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, 2 Samuel 22:29, Psalm 18:28, and 1 John 1:5

<sup>30</sup> See Luke 1:78-79 and John 1:4-9 for two such examples outside of Matthew

<sup>31</sup> See John 8:12

positive, perhaps easily mistaken for some neutral condition. Rather, it should be understood as the active presence of something very negative — sin — the root cause of our separation from God and the death sentence hanging over our heads.

And here in Matthew 4:16, we're not only walking through the darkness, dabbling in sin. We're not just near sin, or caught up in it against our will. We are told that we are "*dwelling in darkness*". We have chosen to pitch our tents there! In Luke 1:79, Zechariah is even more explicit as he sings of Jesus' imminent birth: we have chosen to "*sit in darkness*". We are not going anywhere on our own.

But the grace of God reaches down for us. That's why Matthew is so intentional about tying the image of light to the good news of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is the promised light from Isaiah 9:2, the dawning of a new day in Matthew 4:16. He is "*the sunrise [that] shall visit us from on high*" in Luke 1:78. And perhaps most amazing of all, in Malachi 4:2 he is "*the sun of righteousness [that] shall rise with healing in its wings.*" Jesus doesn't just provide a knowledge of sin, or even only a forgiveness of sins. He washes us completely clean and provides us a righteous standing before God regardless of our past, present, or future failings. That's the good news we have to share, and the eternity we have to look forward to. Just as the morning sun beautifully erases all signs of the dark night, the brilliant rays of Jesus' righteousness drown out all the darkness of our sin.

**BIG IDEA: The gracious gift of Jesus' righteousness is like an overwhelming sunrise that drowns out the darkness of our sin before God.**

**APPLY:**

- **Pray:** Reflect on the sins you find all too easy to "dwell" in. Spend a few moments in confession before the Lord. Pray for the strength to overcome that darkness, and in thanksgiving for the redeeming light we have in Jesus.

## **Week 9: Matthew 4:12-17**

### **Day 4: The beginning of Jesus' ministry.**

**READ: Matthew 4:12-17**

#### **EXPLORE:**

My (Trevor) NIV bible version titles Matt 4:12-17 as "Jesus Begins to Preach." In yesterday's WTL Josh covered Jesus's fulfilling of Isaiah's prophecy in verses 15 and 16. Today, we will focus on verse 17. (NIV, 2011, Matt 4:17) *"From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'"*

The words *"from that time on"* are an indication of this important turning point in the life of Jesus. This is followed by Jesus starting his ministry with the same message as John the Baptist. *"Repent"* - turn away from your self-centeredness and self-focus. But turn to what?

Old Testament prophets often spoke of a future kingdom ruled by a descendant of King David, which would be established on Earth and exist for eternity. So, when Jesus said "The kingdom of heaven has come near" the Jews understood him to be saying the Messiah had come to establish his long-awaited kingdom on earth. This is an exciting message to the Jews living under Roman oppression. Turn from your self-focus and turn to the Messiah who will reign over his earthly kingdom.

Of course, we understand now that the Kingdom of Heaven began when God entered history as a servant in order to rule in man's hearts (a very near kingdom) to set the stage for the ultimate Kingdom of Heaven. This approach as a servant not only ensured our access to the Kingdom of heaven but served as an example of

the gracious, loving, and merciful heart we should emulate as our repentant heart.

**BIG IDEA: The Kingdom of God is as near as allowing the Lord to lead in our lives here and now.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Memorize Matthew 4:17 as a cornerstone of the message of Matthew as we continue to study.
  
- **Question:** What does repentance look like for you? Does Jesus's coming as a servant serve as an example for you?
  
- **Question:** Do you recognize letting the Lord into your heart as establishing the Kingdom of Heaven in your heart?

## **Week 9: Matthew 4:12-17**

### **Day 5: Jesus Begins to Preach**

**READ TOGETHER: Hebrews 2:3, Isaiah 9:1-2, Genesis 49:13,21**

***Instructions:** We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan river to be baptized by John. Now when he hears John has been put in prison, he returns to Galilee. John's ministry had come to a close and now Jesus' ministry will fully begin. We are told He left Nazareth to go and live in Capernaum. Luke's gospel tells us that the people of Nazareth rejected him and tried to kill him. He could not setup his base in his own hometown, but as we see this was in alignment with the Scriptures.

Capernaum was on the border of Zebulun and Naphtali. What a privilege it was for them to host our Lord's ministry base. Galilee was not known as a great region with great men. It was primarily comprised of blue-collar workers. Our Lord chose obscurity and from there he would find His twelve apostles. We are told of the state Zebulun and Naphtali were in before our Lord came. They were a people dwelling in darkness. This of course refers to spiritual darkness. Their region is described as the shadow of death. They are on their last legs spiritually. The eternal darkness of Hades is casting a dark shadow upon them.

It is in this thick darkness that Christ's light shone. He began to preach. His message was the same as John's, *Repent, for the*

*kingdom of heaven is at hand*. The Israelites highly anticipated the inauguration of the kingdom of heaven. What they didn't know was that the kingdom of heaven would come in the person of Jesus Christ.

When we preach, we shine the brightest light upon Jesus Christ. When Jesus wanted to illuminate the hearts and minds of the people of Israel He preached. If we want to illuminate the hearts and minds of man today, we must preach Christ. Before Jesus came healing, He came preaching. We must take note of the fact that Jesus' primary ministry was that of preaching. God pours out special favors upon the preaching of His word. When Christ is preached He calls to us afresh.

**BIG IDEA: A great light shone in Zebulun and Naphtali through the preaching ministry of Christ.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** Why is the ministry of preaching so significant?
  
- **Question:** Why do you think Jesus chose what are considered to be rough men over refined men as His disciples?

## Week 10: Matthew 4:18-25

### Day 1: A Day to Explore

#### READ: Matthew 4:18-25

#### EXPLORE:

*Instructions:* Spend time reading Matthew and complete the activities and questions below.

- **Activity:** While reading, include some observations in the space below.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Questions:** Who did Jesus call? What was their relationship with one another? What were their professions?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Question:** What do you notice about the disciples' position when they were called and how they responded?

- **Question:** Gospel is a word that means good news. In v. 23 we are told that Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom. In your own words, summarize this good news Jesus was proclaiming.
  
- **Question:** What groups did Jesus heal according to vv. 23-24?
  
- **Question:** What happened after His teaching and healing took place?
  
- **Optional Activity and Question:** Look up “crowds” in the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. How did Jesus interact with them and respond to them?



## **Week 10: Matthew 4:18-25**

### **Day 2: Immediate Obedience**

#### **READ: Matthew 4:18-25**

This passage describes how Jesus called four of the disciples to Himself and His mission. Reading this account from Matthew 4, it seems that these are just random strangers that meet Jesus for the first time and then give everything up to follow Him. With the context of the three other gospels, however, we know that this is not the first time that these men had encountered Jesus in some way. It seems clear that Simon and Andrew had been following Christ's ministry for some time before Jesus called them here in Matthew 4. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist before he became a disciple of Jesus.<sup>32</sup> Simon, called Peter, was Andrew's brother and, when told about Christ from Andrew, he willingly came to see Him. John and James were business partners with Simon and Andrew<sup>33</sup> and so were exposed to the teachings of Jesus from John the Baptist through Andrew.

We see the parallel passage of the calling of these four disciples in Mark 1:16-20. In this passage, we see one key difference: that being the reference to Zebedee's servants. This indicates that James and John's father, Zebedee, had a successful fishing business and that the family was affluent enough to have servants working under them. Jesus calls individuals from all walks of life – poor or wealthy, diseased or healthy, despised or respected. Despite being well-off with a business to run, James and John heard the call of Christ and immediately responded to Him with their full-time, devoted, and undistracted commitment. This is not a prescriptive passage in the sense that all believers are called to give up their livelihoods and step into ministry, though some are. In fact, we know that Paul was a tentmaker throughout his own ministry and Luke was a doctor.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, after Christ was crucified, these disciples return to their fishing careers which indicates that they left their business in the hands of capable managers to oversee their

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<sup>32</sup> See John 1:35-42 and Luke 5:3 for reference.

<sup>33</sup> See Luke 5:10 for reference.

<sup>34</sup> See Acts 18:3 and Colossians 4:14 for reference.

business while they served the Lord. Nevertheless, this passage is prescriptive in the sense that when God calls us to salvation or to act in some way, the only appropriate response is immediate obedience, something that is exhibited by all the disciples.

When we hear the call of the Lord on our lives, we must respond right away. Any other response is disobedience. Following Christ always requires us to leave something else behind. Simon and Andrew left their business and position in society. James and John left their business, their family, and their wealth. Following Christ requires one's whole self. We cannot serve two masters; we cannot be divided in our pursuits. Though, we may do other things while we serve the Lord, we must (1) be willing and able to give everything up for the sake of Christ and (2) serve Him foremost amid what we do.

**Big Idea: When God calls us, the only appropriate response is immediate obedience.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Read Matthew 19:16-30. Consider the cost. Reflect on the things in your own life and heart that you cling to instead of surrendering in order to follow Jesus fully. Take time to consider what needs to change in your life to deny yourself and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).
- **Question:** When have you heard God's call in your life? Did you respond immediately, or did you wait? What keeps you from responding to God right away?

## **Week 10: Matthew 4:18-25**

### **Day 3: Synoptic Problems Seen Rightly**

#### **READ: Matthew 4:18-25**

#### **EXPLORE:**

Jesus called Simon and Andrew to follow Him as he passed along the Sea of Galilee and we read that *immediately they left their nets and followed him*.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, Matthew and Mark mirror each other in the retelling of the unfolding events.

Many students of the Scriptures have wondered throughout the centuries about how to rightly understand the relationship between the synoptic gospel accounts.<sup>36</sup> Why are the gospel accounts sometimes identical in wording and, on other occasions, different? Which gospel account came first? Did Matthew, Luke, and John merely copy Mark? How can we know and trust the veracity of their source(s)? These questions have become known today under the title, “The Synoptic Problem.”<sup>37</sup> Matthew 4:20 gives us the opportunity to explore the so-called synoptic problem and ask the question, “Why are the gospel accounts both identical at times and different in others?”

Many skeptical readers of Scripture have argued that the differences in the gospel writings are proof that it cannot be trusted. The opposite is in fact true. For example, if each writer included a mirror copy of what was already written without any linguistic nuance or change of emphasis, there would be far more cause for skepticism. If each gospel account was the exact same, the argument could be made that each of them received later edits which changed their original message. Deconstructionists and skeptical scholars alike cannot dispute the unique and unrivaled historical reliability of the New Testament, including the gospel accounts.

Matthew and Luke seem to be particularly familiar with Mark’s presumably earlier account of Jesus’ life. Mark’s writing is shorter, his Greek is simpler, and his narrative detail is far more minimalistic. Although it is not definitive, a good argument can be made that Mark’s account was first and foundational for the

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<sup>35</sup> See Mark 1:18 and Matthew 4:20 for reference.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the synoptic gospels which means “seen with/together.”

<sup>37</sup> “Problem” is a slightly misleading title used amongst biblical scholars to talk about how to understand the seemingly mysterious relationship between gospel writers and their accounts.

writings which would follow. We need to understand that each gospel writer gave an account of the same historical Jesus to different historical audiences. For this reason and others, it was smart for them to use shared material in coordination with eyewitness accounts to purposefully recount the life and significance of Jesus.

Because of the shared material between Matthew and Luke which is not present in Mark's writing, some have supposed there must have been another source which helped shape the gospels. They have called this mysterious source "Q."<sup>38</sup> Although a case can be made that "Q" existed in the first century, it has not been discovered or attested to in early church history or in the biblical writers themselves. Simply, it is a theory which some have posited makes sense of similarities across gospel accounts.

You may not have stumbled across these questions in your study of Scripture, but it doesn't mean we should remain ignorant to them. Many skeptical scholars in the world are using supposed discrepancies in the gospel accounts to discredit the Scriptures. It should not be this way for a few two primary reasons. First, as scholars B. B. Warfield and Geerhardus Vos (among others) have asserted, the similarities and differences in the writings ought to bolster our confidence, not weaken it. The gospel accounts you read before you were written astoundingly early and they were dependent upon corroborated eyewitness testimony. Second, we shouldn't be surprised when the gospels mirror one another because the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures we have before us. With this assurance in mind, the matter of historical copies and source theory can be seen and studied properly.

Finally, as we close, let me (Stephen) add a brief pastoral note on biblical study of tough questions. We ought to study well, read widely, and learn in godly community. We shouldn't fear tough questions, we shouldn't allow our own pride to delete what is fundamentally mysterious, and we shouldn't allow our need to study God's Word to eclipse our need to apply it by the power of His Holy Spirit. So, we should study the disciples' response in Mark 1 and Matthew 4 deeply, but moreover we ought to study in a way that we respond the same. May your study of Scripture help you respond immediately in obedience and conformity to Christ!

**BIG IDEA: The differences and similarities in the gospel accounts should strengthen our confidence. Scriptural study ought to result in godly action.**

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<sup>38</sup> The hypothetical document was called "Q" from the German word Quelle which means source.

## **Week 10: Matthew 4:18-25**

### **Day 4: The Kingdom Expanding**

**READ: Matthew 4:18-25**

#### **EXPLORE:**

When Genesis tells the story of how God created everything that is, we are left with an overwhelming impression of its goodness. In unrivaled power and authority, He set the stars in the sky, separated land from sea, and fashioned Adam and Eve uniquely to bear His image. It was all good— wonderfully good!

You don't have to look very far, however, to realize that the universe which God created as good is not good any longer. Because of humanity's sinful departure from God's good design, the beautiful creation was broken, introducing sin and death. The Scriptures help us see that the brokenness of sin doesn't merely exist around us; it exists within us! Marriages dissolve. Families are destroyed. Wars break out. People become ill and die. Questions remain unanswered, and humanity was left to wonder, "How will things be made right again? How can God make things new? How can a sinful humanity be reconciled to a holy God?"

Because of His great love for us, the God of creation entered into the brokenness of His creation. Jesus Christ experienced the full weight of human sinfulness, yet He never erred. In a world filled with evil, Jesus both taught and embodied the good news of God's redemptive work. He spoke about the kingdom of heaven, the order that was honoring to God coming near!

Sickness, spiritual oppression, and all forms of affliction were brought on because of the sinful fall of humanity. All was broken in creation because of sin, but thanks be to God that Christ came to usher in a new way of light and life in a world of darkness and death.

As a marker of God's kingdom expanding on earth, the sick were healed throughout Galilee. As a marker of God's kingdom breaking through, those who were oppressed experienced healing through Christ. As a marker of God's kingdom drawing near, spiritually hardened hearts were transformed by the life and ministry of Jesus.

Creation was and still is devastated by the effects of sin and a world that has departed from God's good design. With that in mind, we need to remember that Jesus' ministry stands as a powerful reminder of God's goodness and power, despite it all. Jesus' ministry in the Galilean countryside stands as a powerful reminder of the realities of God's kingdom expansion, which is already occurring but not yet fully completed.

**BIG IDEA: Jesus' ministry in the Galilean countryside stands as a powerful reminder of the realities of God's kingdom expansion, which is already occurring but not yet fully completed.**

**APPLY:**

- **Activity:** Spend time praying that your heart would be obedient to the Lord, trusting toward His work, and active in participation within His kingdom!

## **Week 10: Matthew 4:18-25**

### **Day 5: Disciples Called and Commissioned**

**READ TOGETHER: Romans 8:29, Matthew 16:24-26, Psalm 103:3-5**

***Instructions:*** *We believe that biblical study and spiritual growth are meant to be shared. This Word to Life has that exact focus in mind. For some, Day 5 might be a good opportunity to lead your family in a devotional. For others, this study might serve as a simple reminder to tactfully communicate your faith with those around you. Regardless, this study is designed to help you grow in your faith by sharing it with others.*

### **EXPLORE TOGETHER:**

Now that Jesus lives by the Sea of Galilee, it seems that He would have taken many walks by it. On one occasion as He is contemplating the things of God, He comes across brothers fishing. Since His preaching ministry has begun, it is time for Him to recruit disciples to join Him. He does not choose the wealthiest or the wisest men of Galilee to be His disciples. He chooses fishermen, who would have been unlearned and poor. However, they also would have been hard-working men and used to trials, difficulties, and long nights.

The first pair of brothers are Peter and Andrew; the second pair of brothers were James and John. According to the gospel of John, it seems Jesus already had a previous acquaintance with them. They had followed Jesus for a time, but now they would follow Him exclusively and never leave His side. All four may also have previously been disciples of John the Baptist, which would have made them great candidates to be followers of Jesus. Jesus' call to them was short and direct. *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.* Now, they did not understand fully what Jesus was saying, but they did know who was calling them. And so, they

immediately left their boats and followed Him. After being called, they were immediately commissioned into the work of the Lord.

They joined Jesus as He went throughout all Galilee preaching and healing every disease and affliction among the people. What an amazing adventure to be able to see first-hand the wonderful works of God through the mouth and hands of Jesus! Jesus' fame spread throughout even the Gentile world of Syria. They were bringing to Him all the sick, and He healed them. He healed them free of charge. He healed them without delay. He healed them completely. And great crowds followed Him even as far as Jerusalem and Judea.

Jesus started out fast. There was nothing that He did early on that He did not do later. He kept on faithfully preaching and healing until His hour came. His disciples joined Him until they scattered when His hour did come. Following Christ is never boring! When Christ calls us to Himself, He calls us to His work.

**BIG IDEA: Soon after being called, the disciples were busy right away.**

**APPLY TOGETHER:**

- **Question:** What does it mean to be a fisher of men? Think about all the possibilities with this analogy.
  
- **Activity:** Describe what it was like when Christ first called you and what kind of work He put you to.







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