

Matthew: His Life And His Gospel – Part 2

Matthew 3:4-9 [New King James] *“Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But 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? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and 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.’”*

John the Baptist was markedly different from other religious leaders of his day, his appearance was based on that of Elijah, [2 Kings 1:8] not overlooked by religious leaders.

John caused a great stir at the very heart of Judaism.

The religious leaders of John’s day were preoccupied with winning the praise of the people. John’s concern was only bringing praise to God.

The different way that John lived helped to show that the message he preached was different to that of the religious leaders.

John attracted people because he was the first true prophet in 400 years.

John denounced both Herod and the religious leaders, daring acts that fascinated the common people.

But John had strong words for his audience for they too were sinners and needed to repent. John’s message was powerful and true.

Many people were expecting a prophet like Elijah, [Malachi 4:5-6; Luke 1:11-17] and John seemed to be that man.

John used an outward sign of cleansing, baptism by complete immersion in water, of what should take place within the minds and hearts of the people baptised.

The Jews used baptism to initiate converts, so John’s audience was familiar with the rite.

The Jewish religious leaders were divided into several groups, two of which were the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Pharisees separated themselves from everything non-Jewish and carefully followed Old Testament laws and the oral traditions handed down through the centuries.

The Sadducees believed the Pentateuch alone [Genesis – Deuteronomy] to be God’s Word. They were mainly descended from priestly nobility, while the Pharisees came from all classes of people.

The two groups disliked each other greatly, and both opposed Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist criticised the Pharisees for being legalistic and hypocritical, following the letter of the law while ignoring its true intent.

John the Baptist criticised the Sadducees for using religion to advance their political position.

John the Baptist called people to more than words or traditional ritual, he told them to change their behaviour, [verse 8].

We need to ask ourselves, ‘do our actions match our words?’

The danger of relying on pedigree or position in society, rather than spiritual conformity to God’s way of life, is an ever-present danger, [**John 8:30-36**].

Matthew 3:10 [New King James] *“And 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.”*

People will be judged for their unproductive lives.

God calls us to be active in our obedience. John compared people who claim they believe God but do not live for God to unproductive trees that will be cut down.

To be productive for God we must obey His Word, the Christian Bible, [we have to know what it actually tells us, to do first!] resist temptations, actively serve and help other people and share our faith in Jesus Christ with others.

Matthew 3:11-12 [New King James] *“I indeed baptise 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 baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His 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 baptism was to point people to Jesus Christ but also to the work Jesus Christ would do.

John was looking forward to the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, [**Acts 2**] when He would be sent by Jesus Christ in the form of tongues of fire, empowering His followers to preach the gospel message that He had brought to all humanity from God the Father.

John’s statement also symbolises the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, [**Romans 8:9**] in bringing His judgement on all humanity, [**2 Corinthians 5:10-12**]. Those who refuse to repent will end up in the lake of fire, [**Revelation 20:13-15; Revelation 21:7-8**].

A winnowing fan was used on the threshing-floor to separate the useful wheat from the useless chaff, which was burnt, the wheat was gathered into the storehouse for use.

“Winnowing” is often used as a picture of God’s judgement. **Unrepentant people will be judged and discarded because they are worthless in doing God’s work among humanity**, those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Lord will be saved and used by God to extend His Kingdom.

John had been explaining that Jesus Christ’s baptism would be much greater when Jesus Christ came to him to be baptised.

Matthew 3:13-17 [New King James] *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptised by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptised, 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. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”*

Why did Jesus Christ ask to be baptised?

It was **not** for repentance from sin, for He never sinned, [**2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5**].

John was obedient to the request of Jesus Christ for he knew who He was, [**John 1:29-34**].

John 1:16-17 [New King James] *“And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

What Jesus Christ did and what John did were approved by God the Father.

The doctrine of the Trinity of God means that God is three persons and yet one in essence. In this passage of scripture all three persons of the Trinity are present and active.

Other references to the Triune God are found in God’s Word, the Christian Bible, [**Matthew 28:19; John 15:26; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5 and 1 Peter 1:2**].

[There are also articles on this website on the Triune God listed under ‘*Trinity Of God*’ which will help you understand more this great mystery of our Eternal God.]

Matthew 4:1-2 [New King James] *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.”*

There is one thing that we must carefully note at the beginning of our study of the temptations of Jesus Christ, that is the meaning of the word “tempt,” Greek word used is “pēirazō” meaning to put to the test, prove, try.

What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin, it is meant to enable us to conquer sin.

It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger, finer and purer from the ordeal.

Just as metal has to be tested far beyond any stress or strain that it will ever be called upon to bear before it can be put to any useful purpose, so a person has to be tested before God can use them for His purposes.

We need to note also that the test took place in the wilderness, a place where Jesus Christ could be more alone than anywhere else in Palestine.

Jesus Christ went into the wilderness to be alone.

His task had come to Him, God the Father had spoken to Him, he must now think how He was to attempt the task which God the Father had given Him to do, **He had to get things straightened out before He started. To do that He had to be alone.**

There are certain further things we must note before we proceed to a detailed study of the temptations of Jesus Christ.

All three gospel accounts stress the immediacy with which these temptations followed the baptism of Jesus Christ, [**Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1**].

It is one of the truths that after every great moment there comes a moment of reaction, in which too often danger lies.

This happened to Elijah after he, all alone, faced the defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, [**1 Kings 18:17-40; 1 Kings 19:3**].

For Jesus Christ this was a struggle that went on in His own mind and heart, an inner struggle.

It is through our innermost thoughts and desires that Satan the tempter attacks us.

We must **not** think that this was the only campaign in which Jesus Christ conquered Satan. Jesus told His disciples that they were the ones that continued with Him in His trials, [**Luke 22:28**]. **Never in all**

history was there such a fight with temptation as Jesus Christ waged in Gethsemane when Satan sought to deflect Him from facing the death on the cross, [Luke 22:42-44].

In our Christian warfare there is no release, we never grow physically or spiritually to a place when we are beyond temptation, a stage where the power of Satan is forever broken.

Jesus Christ never reached that stage, from the beginning to the end of every day He had to fight His battle. That is why He can help us fight ours.

One thing stands out in the record of Jesus Christ's temptations, the specific temptations were such as could come to a person who had very special powers and knew that they had them.

We must remember that we again and again are tempted through our gifts or talents.

The person who is gifted with the power of words will be tempted to use their command of words to produce glib excuses to justify their own conduct.

A person with great gifts of mind will be tempted to use these gifts for themselves and not for the benefit of others less gifted, becoming the master of other people and not their servant.

It is a grim fact of temptation that is just where we are strongest that we must be forever on the watch.

No-one can ever read this account of Jesus Christ's temptations without remembering that its source must have been Jesus Christ Himself, for in the wilderness he was alone; no-one was with Him when this struggle was being fought out. We only know about it because Jesus Christ must have told His disciples about this struggle, opening up His innermost heart and mind to us.

In this recorded account Jesus Christ is saying to us that He can help us who are tempted because He Himself was tempted, [Hebrews 4:15-16].

"Stones to bread" – Jesus Christ was being tempted to use the power He had selfishly, and that He refused to do.

Jesus Christ proved He did have this power to feed people with bread when he fed the 5,000 and 4,000 people in the wilderness, [Mark 8:18-21].

There is another side to this temptation, one sure way to persuade people to follow you is to give them material things: bread! Does not Israel's history justify this?

God gave manna in the wilderness?

But to give people bread would be a double mistake.

First, it would be a bribe, and people would only follow Jesus Christ for what they can get out of Him.

This is the false concept of the "health and wealth gospel" that is promoted by some churches.

Jesus Christ offers us our personal cross, to crucify our old way of serving only self and live now to serve our Creator God, [Romans 6:1-7].

Jesus Christ called people to a life of giving, not getting.

To bribe people with material things would be the denial of all that He taught, [Mark 10:42-45].

Jesus Christ answered Satan in the very words that express the lesson which God seeks to teach His people.

Deuteronomy 8:3 [New King James] *“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”*

The only way to true satisfaction in life is the way that is learnt from God’s Word, the Christian Bible, the key being our total dependence on our Creator God, [John 15:1-8].

“Pinnacle of the temple” – there was one corner of the Temple building where Solomon’s porch and the Royal porch met, there was a sheer drop of 450 feet into the valley of the Kedron below.

People would be startled into following a man who could survive such a jump.

Satan misquoted **Psalms 91:11-12**, such promises were the tools of false messiahs and Satan will continue to use such *“signs and wonders”* to deceive people, [Mark 13:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:9].

To retain a following this way a person must produce ever greater and greater sensations. Wonders tend to be “nine day wonders.”

Jesus Christ quoted **Deuteronomy 6:16**, meaning there is no good seeing how far you can go with God, there is no good putting yourself deliberately into a threatening situation, then expecting God to rescue you from it.

The Eternal God may expect a person to take risks in order to be true to Him, but He does not expect anyone to take risks to enhance their own prestige.

Any *“faith”* that is dependent on signs and wonders is not a faith at all, it is doubt looking for proof in the wrong place.

“Kingdoms of the world” – Jesus Christ did **not** say that these kingdoms were **not** Satan’s to give, [2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19].

The Eternal God has allowed this rulership of Satan for a good reason, [James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9] when we resist Satan we draw nearer to God.

We can also overcome Satan’s influence in society by preaching the good news of what Jesus Christ has done for all humanity and be a light to others who do not yet know Him as their Saviour, [Revelation 12:7-12].

Satan wanted Jesus Christ to compromise and avoid the horrific pain of the cross to become the Saviour of humanity, [John 3:16-17] and then return as King of kings and Lord of lords, [Revelation 17:14].

Jesus Christ quoted **Deuteronomy 6:13** followed by an order that Satan had to obey.

Jesus Christ had made His decision, knowing it would involve the sacrifice on a Roman cross but followed by a resurrection from the grave, destroying any power that Satan has over humanity, the fear of physical death, [Hebrews 2:14-15].

Never forget that Jesus Christ as the human Son of Man always knew He would have to face a painful death on the cross, a very heavy burden for Him to carry, [2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Revelation 13:8].

Matthew 4:12-16 [New King James] *“Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,*

Galilee of the Gentiles: 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.’”

Before very long disaster came to John the Baptist.

He was arrested and imprisoned in the dungeons of the Castle of Machaerus by Herod Antipas, his crime was that he had publicly denounced Herod for seducing his brother’s wife and making her his own wife, after he had put away the wife that he had.

It is never safe to rebuke an eastern despot, and John’s courage brought him first imprisonment, a complete contrast to his open freedom of the wilderness, then later death.

For Jesus Christ the time had come when He must go forth to His task of telling humanity about the Kingdom of God.

The first thing that Jesus Christ did was to leave Nazareth, his home town, never to live there again. This was symbolic of a clean cut between His old life and into a new life in Capernaum.

Galilee was the most northern district of Palestine with a vast population. [The historian Josephus tells us that there were two hundred and four villages, none with a population of fewer than fifteen thousand people.]

Josephus also tells us that the people in this region were fond of innovations, by nature disposed to change and delighted in seditions.

These inborn characteristics of the Galileans made them very fertile ground for a new message to be preached.

Galilee was literally surrounded by Gentiles, on the west Phoenicians, to the north and east the Syrians, even to the south, there lay the territory of the Samaritans.

Inevitably this part of Palestine was in touch with non-Jewish ideas. Also the great trade roads of the world passed through Galilee, while away to the south Judaea was isolated and secluded. Judaea could erect a fence to keep all foreign influence and new ideas out.

Galilee’s geographical position had affected its history, again and again it had been invaded and conquered.

All of this made Galilee the one place where a new teacher with a new message had a real chance of being heard.

Matthew 4:17 [New King James] *“From that time Jesus began to **preach** and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”*

Finally, Matthew gives us a brief one-sentence summary of the message Jesus Christ brought from God the Father.

The word “*preach*” is the Greek word “*kērussō*” meaning a herald proclaiming a message from the king, especially divine truth.

This word tells us that what Jesus Christ said had certainty, authority, from a source beyond the person; it was the voice of God the Father transmitted through Jesus Christ to the people, [John 5:19-30; John 6:38].