

Matthew 3

¹¹ *"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² 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."*

Mark 1

⁷ *And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

Luke 3

¹⁵ *As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

¹⁸ *So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.*

Comment: Luke introduced John's contrast between himself and Jesus by telling us that people "were questioning ... whether he might be the Christ" (Luke 3:15). His answer was basically that the two people were in different dimensions. Yes, John was a super-man in several ways: He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15); he was a prophet chosen by God, the first one since Malachi, 400 years earlier; he was selected to introduce the Son of God but John recognized the huge difference between himself and the Messiah. John was completely human and Jesus was divine—God in the flesh. He compared the difference not just between a slave and his master but in how a slave would be compared to the dirty feet of his master. This is not John just being humble, it was his recognition that God's Son was in a different dimension of quality. When we come to God in prayer, we need to recognize and acknowledge that we are also indescribably inferior to our Creator. Yes, He calls us "*friend*" but the difference goes beyond words. Worship Him today with that attitude! "*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty*" (Rev. 4:8).

Meditation: John suggests that the farmer's separation of the wheat from the chaff is like God's final separation of the righteous from the unrighteous. The wheat is gathered and saved, while the chaff is burned. What kind of fire is "*unquenchable*"? Think about a farmer burning the chaff. How long would the fire burn if the chaff were the fuel? How does that relate to the punishment of the unrighteous in hell? Will they be consumed? If so, why would the fire be "*unquenchable*"? Is there a difference between the farmer's fire that burns up and the fire of hell that continues forever? Jesus called hell's fire, "*the eternal fire*" (Matt. 25:41).

Matthew 3

¹³ *Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.*

¹⁴ *John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"* ¹⁵ *But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.* ¹⁶ *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him,^[fn] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;* ¹⁷ *and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son,^[fn] with whom I am well pleased."*

ESV Footnotes

(3:16) Some manuscripts omit *to him*
(3:17) Or *my Son, my (or the) Beloved*

Mark 1

⁹ *In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.*

¹⁰ *And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son,^[fn] with you I am well pleased."*

ESV Footnotes

(1:11) Or *my Son, my (or the) Beloved*

Luke 3

²¹ *Now when all the people were baptized,*

and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened,²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son;^[fn] with you I am well pleased."
^[fn]

ESV Footnotes

(3:22) Or *my Son, my (or the) Beloved*
(3:22) Some manuscripts *beloved Son; today I have begotten you*

Comment: In these three parallel accounts of Jesus' baptism by John, only Matthew provides insight into the question as to why Jesus wanted John to baptize Him. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and Jesus was sinless. Why would Jesus ask John to baptize Him? John seemed to be aware of this incongruity, objecting that if any baptism were to be accomplished between them, it should be Jesus who would baptize John. Jesus' only response, His first recorded words since He was 12 years old, was simply, "*Let it be so now*" (Matt. 3:14). It was as if Jesus was asking for an exception, admitting that it looked inappropriate and unnecessary. It had nothing to do with a requirement of the Law. Many suggestions have been offered to answer the "Why?" but all of them leave questions in my mind. This was not an act of substitution for us, as Martin Luther said, because that was accomplished on the cross. Some say that it confirmed John's baptism but couldn't that have been done in a more acceptable way? It could have been for Jesus to identify with sinful people but did He *have* to do that in such an unfitting way? If it were to connect His ministry with John's, that could have been done by Jesus baptizing John. Whatever the true reason, it was used as the event through which Jesus' ministry was dramatically introduced by the voice that came from heaven following His baptism.

Matthew 4

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and
"On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

Mark 1

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ^{13a} And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Luke 4

¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

(break—see below)

⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' ¹¹ and
"On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

(continued below)

Matthew 4

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

"'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left him,

and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Mark 1

13b

And he was with the wild animals,

and the angels were ministering to him.

Luke 4

(break—see above)

⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

"'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Comment: Mark gives a very brief account of the temptation of Jesus by Satan, so most of our consideration will be between Matthew and Luke. There are three particular events described but they are not listed in the same order. Since Matthew uses the time-related adverb "*then*" at the beginning of the second temptation, compared to Luke's more general "*and*," I have followed Matthew's order in the columns. Jesus answered each of the devil's temptations with the Word of God, beginning with the same phrase, "*It is written...*" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Each of Jesus' quotes during the 40 days of temptation come from the book of Deuteronomy, given during the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness. The statements were the words of Moses given to Israel before they were to cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. They were God's words through Moses to Israel but Jesus was holding Himself accountable to them in His defense against Satan. They applied to Jesus and they also apply to us: 1) Don't neglect the necessary "*bread*" of spiritual life. Make your time in God's Word as important to you as the food you eat. 2) Don't test God. Accept responsibility for things that are within your own capability to perform. 3) Don't worship anything or anyone other than God. Place God as your highest value and priority in life.

February 6 — Reading 27 — John 1:19-28 — **The Voice**

John 1

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he

answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight^[fn] the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

ESV Footnote

(1:23) Or crying out, 'In the wilderness make straight

Comment: I doubt if anyone at NBC television thought of John the Baptist when they named their popular show "The Voice" but that is what John called himself. The TV show contestants want to win, so they do their best to point attention to themselves and their excellent singing voices. John was just the opposite. He already had a huge following, enough to alarm the Jewish religious authorities who sent an investigation party to find out more about him. They asked him the same question twice: "Who are you?" (1:19, 22). They thought John had the same TV attitude: "Look at me ... I am someone special!" So, he answered their underlying question with, "*I am not the Christ*" (:20). How about someone not quite as important, like Elijah, who didn't die and was predicted in the last two verses of the Old Testament to return "*before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes*"? (Mal. 4:5). It is surprising that John didn't recognize himself in that role after Gabriel had told his father that "*he will go ... in the spirit and power of Elijah... to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*" (Luke 1:17). Jesus later confirmed that John "*is Elijah who is to come*" (Matt. 11:14). Then, could he be "*the Prophet*"? They were referring to the prediction of Moses that "*God will raise up for you a prophet like me*" (Deut. 18:15), which the people later called "*the Prophet*" (John 7:40) who would precede the coming Messiah. John's response to that question was negative as well, giving them a simple "No." They asked their question for the second time: then "*Who are you?*" His answer was basically, "Just a voice." We don't have to be special, either, to serve Christ in His ministry on earth. We have a voice and we have a message—just a bunch of nobodies with a marvelous message of introduction to Jesus. Let's just tell people the truth about Jesus. Most people around us have some misconceptions of who Jesus is but many of those ideas don't come from the Bible. Just be a voice.

Meditation: Why do you think the Pharisees ended up asking John, "*Then why are you baptizing...*?" What were they concerned about? Were they protecting something that had to do with their theology or with their ideas of what they considered was "proper"? Was their intent to limit John's ministry? Do you see any of those attitudes in our modern culture? Are we seen as people who are doing things that we are not authorized to do or things that are not acceptable to the culture? Does that tend to make you pull back in your efforts to serve God in ministry? Did John really answer their question? What was the focus of his response?

February 7 — Reading 28 — John 1:29-34 — **This is He!**

John 1

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to

*baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'*³⁴ *And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

Comment: The day after John's encounter with the Pharisees, he was probably speaking to his disciples when he called attention to Jesus as he saw Him approaching. John's life purpose was to present the Christ and here is his formal introduction. Twice he said, "*This is he...*" (Vv. 30, 33) and twice he gave him a significant title. The first title is "*the Lamb of God*" (:29), which is used only by John the Baptist in the New Testament (here and in vs. 36). It brings to mind all the previous Old Testament history of sacrificial worship to God, beginning with the substitute sacrifice God provided for Abraham in place of his son, Isaac (Gen. 22:13). The unblemished lambs sacrificed at the first Passover in Egypt were substitutes for the firstborn people in each Jewish house (Ex. 12:11-13). The purpose of the sacrifice of the final Passover Lamb on the cross would be to "[take] away the sin of the world!" That was the introduction of the Lamb. The second time John said, "*this is he*" (John 1:33) was for the introduction of the Son: "*this is the Son of God*" (:34). Perhaps his disciples had not heard the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism but John did: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. 3:17). This is He: God's Sacrifice and God's Son.

Meditation: Twice also in this passage John said, "*I myself did not know him*" (:31, 33). What did John mean by this statement? After all, they were relatives. Although they grew up in different parts of Israel, their mothers seemed to be good friends and Jesus traveled to the Passover in Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph every year. If it seems inconceivable that John didn't know Jesus in that literal, physical way, in what way did he "*not know him*"? Maybe it would help to think about *this* statement made by John: "*After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me*" (:30). How could John say that Jesus was "*before me*" when John was born about six months before Jesus was born?