

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 2

The Forerunner, Baptism, Temptation and Early Ministry of the King

Matthew Chapters 3-4

Outline

- 1A. The Forerunner of the King (3:1-12)
- 2A. The Baptism of the King (3:13-17)
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John the Baptist's Ministry

In the ancient world, when a king went to a country or to a city, he would usually send certain men to go before him to announce his soon coming and to prepare for his arrival. Such men were known as forerunners or heralds. Likewise, when the King of the Jews was about to begin His public ministry, God sent a man before Him to announce His coming and to spiritually prepare the nation for His arrival. This forerunner was John the Baptist, and he is introduced to us in Matthew chapter 3.

John the Baptist's ministry was to ready the people of Israel and prepare them for their Saviour. No one is ready for a Saviour unless there is an honest recognition of sin. When people were baptized by John they publically confessed their sins and acknowledged their wrongs (Matthew 3:6).

As Matthew chapter 3 begins, many years have gone by since Matthew chapter 2. The Lord Jesus is now about 30 years old (Luke 3:23), and John the Baptist is just slightly older: six months older (Luke 1:36). Notice John 1:15 which looks at the age of Jesus as compared to that of John the Baptist from the standpoints of both

the Lord's humanity and His deity. According to His humanity, John the Baptist came before Jesus; Jesus "came after" John by a time period of six months. However, Jesus existed prior to His birth in Bethlehem. According to His deity, Jesus was "before" John because He was the eternal Son of God (John 1:1-3). So in one sense Jesus was younger than John and in another sense Jesus was far older than John. The Lord Jesus was from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

John the Baptist represented the prophets of the Old Testament. The prophets made it clear that the Jewish people were to be the custodians (containers) of the promises and predictions of God. Israel was to be involved in the outworking of the plan and purpose of God. They were to be God's witnesses, pointing clearly to Him (Isaiah 43:10). The people of Israel, because of their unbelief, failed in their God-given assignment, but their failure did not stop God's purpose and program. Israel's unbelief did not make the faithfulness of God of none effect (Romans 3:3).

The prophets were voices for God and from God and they were raised up to speak to the people of Israel and to point them to Christ. John the Baptist was the last and the greatest Old Testament prophet (Matthew 11:11). The other prophets pointed to the Christ who would someday come; John the Baptist pointed to the Christ who was already on the scene. John the Baptist, as he baptized Jesus, actually touched the physical body of the Lord Jesus Christ; Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets could not do this, since Christ had not yet become a man.

John the Baptist pointed clearly to the Lord Jesus Christ: "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). His message was very simple: "Here He is! The One God promised has come!"

The rebellion and unbelief of Israel which we saw in Matthew chapter 2 (the unbelief and the refusal to go to Bethlehem and worship the Messiah) is now denounced by John in Matthew chapter 3. John condemns this rebellion and he preaches a message of repentance. They needed to repent or change their minds about God, about themselves, about their sin. They needed change their attitude and see themselves as God saw them. Jesus taught that those who are healthy ("whole") do not need a doctor (Luke 5:30-32). Only sick people need physicians. The children of Israel needed to recognize how sin-sick they were (Isaiah 1:5-6; Jeremiah 17:9). No people are ready for the Saviour unless they recognize how sinful they are. Self-righteous people will never get saved unless they change their mind (repent!) and see how needy they really are.

After 400 years of silence (the period of history from Malachi to Matthew), there comes a voice announcing God's message and publicly pointing to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist was God's "voice" (see Isaiah 40:3). His message was brief and to the point: "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). The Jews knew what John the Baptist meant by "the kingdom of heaven." It was the Kingdom which had been promised by all the Old Testament prophets. It was the Kingdom ruled by the Messiah as seen in such

passages as Isaiah 2:2-5; Isaiah 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5-8 and many other passages. The Old Testament prophets spoke of this Kingdom often, but John's message was different. The Old Testament prophets said, "The Kingdom is coming," but it was a distant event in the future. John said, "The Kingdom is at hand (near)." John announced that the Kingdom was not a distant event, but a near event. In fact, the King Himself was already on the earth! The Kingdom was near because Christ was here!

John also taught that there was a spiritual requirement in order to enter the Kingdom. Not everyone could enter the Kingdom. A person had to be spiritually fit and had to meet the spiritual requirements (compare Matthew 5:20 where a certain standard of righteousness was required). Because of these requirements, John the Baptist told the Jewish people to repent. They needed to recognize their sinful condition, and also recognize that Jesus Christ was the only One who could take care of their sin (compare John 1:29).

The description of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:4 shows him to be a rugged, Elijah type man. Notice his diet in verse 4. Most people would enjoy honey but would not have an appetite for locusts (a grasshopper-like creature). This man was God's unique servant for this special time.

The self-righteous Pharisees and Sadducees did not see themselves as sinners. They refused to repent, and John the Baptist gave them a strong warning (Matt. 3:7). Those who refuse to recognize their sin and refuse to turn to God's only Saviour will someday face God's wrath (Matthew 3:7).

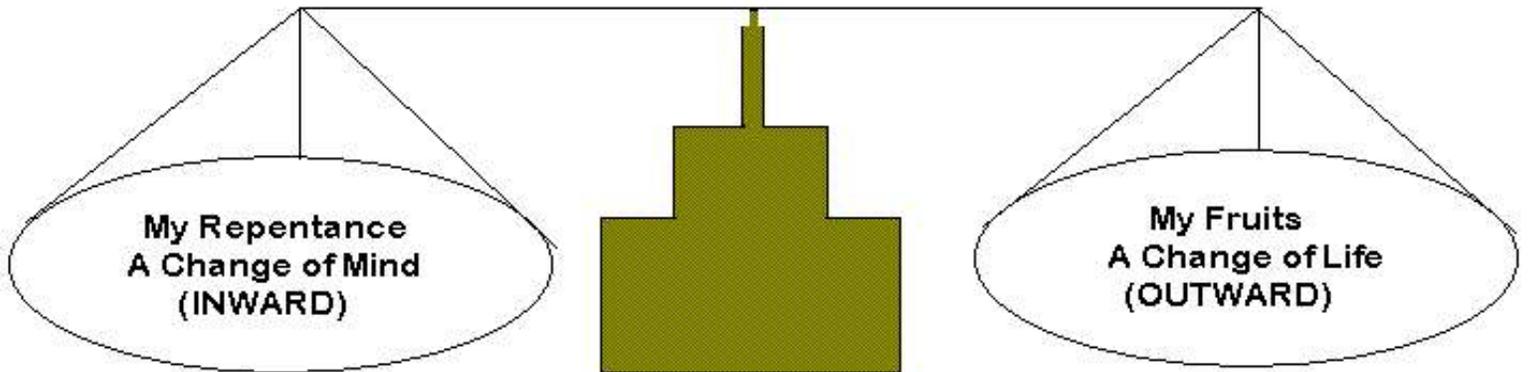
John the Baptist warned them that repentance was absolutely necessary (Matthew 3:7-8). They needed to have evidence of repentance. If a person really repents, then there ought to be a change. The Lord Jesus is the only Person who can bring about this kind of change. Repentance is the root; change is the fruit. It is not enough to *SAY* that you have repented; you must *SHOW* that you have repented.

We need to encourage young people and help them to understand that anyone can make a profession with his lips. Anyone can say that he (or she) is a Christian. Anyone can say that he (or she) has been born again. A person can say that he is a hard boiled egg, but just saying something does not mean it is so.

John the Baptizer gave very careful instructions to the multitude which came to be baptized by him. He commanded them to repent (3:2); "repent" meant to change their whole way of thinking concerning sin, self and the Saviour. John's baptism was an outward rite which was to symbolize and picture an inner reality of a changed heart and mind (repentance). As you look at a person you cannot see repentance, because it takes place in the heart and mind of a person. But the evidence of repentance can be seen. John calls this the "fruits meet for (worthy of) repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Remember, roots are invisible and under the ground, but fruits are visible and outward.

John told the multitude to "bring forth fruits (meet for) worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8). The Greek word translated "worthy of" means "corresponding to, equal in weight to, weighing as much as" and it was used to describe that equal condition when two weights were "balanced" on a scale.

BALANCED! WEIGHING THE SAME!

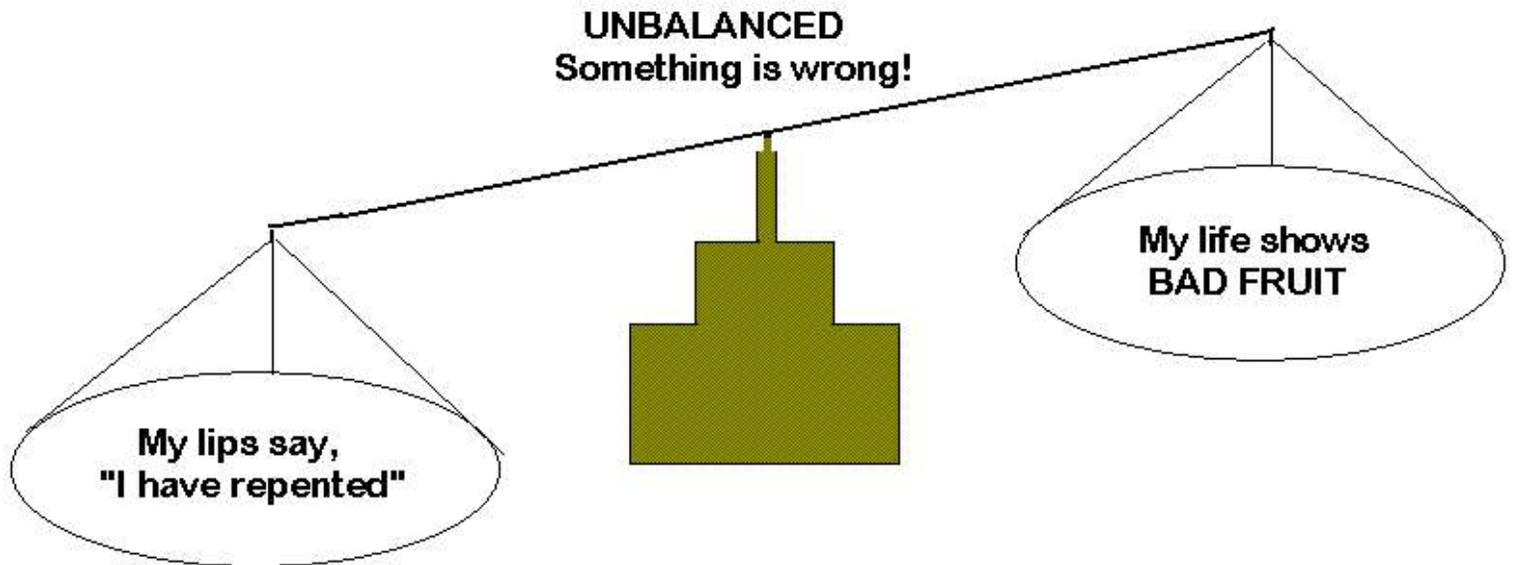


"God has done a work in my heart and I have changed my mind about myself, my sin and my Saviour!"

"The work that God has done and is doing in me is now producing fruits that all can see!"

John's message was this: "Make sure your fruits weigh as much as your repentance. Don't just say that you have repented. Don't just symbolize your repentance by baptism. [Is it possible for a person to be baptized in a church and not really be saved?] Show your repentance by fruits. If you have really repented, then prove it! If you are really an apple tree, then let others see your apples!"

In Luke 3:10-14 John the Baptist told the people how they could prove that they had really repented! How can you prove to others that you have really repented and believed on Christ? The danger comes when a person says one thing with his lips and another thing with his life:



In this illustration, my fruits do not weigh as much as my (professed) repentance. My lips say one thing, but my life says the opposite (see Titus 1:16 and 1 John 2:4; 2:9).

Repentance is an inward transaction that takes place between God and man. It is something that takes place in the heart and mind of a person and it cannot be seen by others. It is impossible to look at a crowd of people and to know which ones have repented and which ones have not.

Fruit, in contrast to inner repentance, can be clearly seen by others. Fruit is the natural outflow and result of a person being in a right relationship to the Lord. A healthy tree will naturally bring forth good fruit (Matthew 7:17-18). A healthy believer will do the same.

Notice the strong words and warning that John gave to those Jews whose fruits would not weigh as much as their (supposed) repentance (Matthew 3:9-12). He warned them of coming judgment.

Someone has once asked this question, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Could a Bible worn with use be brought forth? Could several witnesses testify that you spoke to them about the Saviour? What evidence could your friends submit? What would your teachers at school have to say? What about your neighbors? What about your family members who know you best? Prove that you have *ROOTS* (the unseen part) by showing forth *FRUITS* (the seen part).

John the Baptist's ministry was to make people ready so that they might really be able to do business with the Lord Jesus Christ in a very marvellous and wonderful way. People (living then as well as today) need to have the right kind of heart attitude, the kind of repentance that is necessary and needful in order to be really

saved. When Christ came into the world at His first coming, He came to be the Saviour of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15; John 3:17; Matthew 1:21). Those who do not receive Him as Saviour must someday face Him as Judge.

The Baptism of Jesus

In Matthew 3:13-17 we learn of the baptism of Jesus. He was baptized in obedience to the will of God. John the Baptist was a sinner, as we all are (Rom. 3:10,23; 1 Kings 8:46). John knew something of the wonder of the Person of Christ, that He was so much greater than he was. John knew that he was not even worthy to carry His sandals (Matthew 3:11). John had a humble heart and he did not understand why he, a sinner, should baptize the sinless One (Matt. 3:14). However, the Lord Jesus overruled this objection because submitting to John's baptism was the right thing to do (Matthew 3:15).

The Lord Jesus came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John (Matthew 3:13). John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance" (Acts 13:24; and compare Matthew 3:2,8,11). Did Jesus need to repent? Obviously not. He did not need to change His mind and recognize the terribleness of His sins because He was totally without sin (Hebrews 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21).

When a Jew was baptized by John, he would confess his sins according to Matthew 3:6. Was it possible for Jesus to do this? Absolutely not, because a person cannot confess his sins if he does not have any! The Lord Jesus was absolutely sinless.

If the Lord Jesus Christ did not need to repent and had no sins to confess, then why did He come forward to be baptized by John? Apparently John asked the same question, because when Jesus came to him, John tried to prevent (forbid, hinder, restrain) Him from being baptized, saying, "I have need to be baptized by Thee, and comest Thou to me?" (Matthew 3:14). In other words, John was saying, "I'm the one who needs this, not You! You should be the Baptizer, not me. Why should the sinner baptize the Saviour?" Thus, John made every effort to hinder Jesus from being baptized.

Today, what hinders a person from being baptized (see Acts 8:35-39)?

Notice how the Lord answered John: "Suffer it (allow it, permit it, let it be, don't forbid it) to be so now: for thus it becometh (it is fitting, proper, right) us (Jesus and John) to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Even though Jesus was sinless and had no need of repentance, being baptized by John was the *right* thing to do, and John "suffered (allowed, permitted) Him" (Matthew 3:15).

Why was it right for the sinless Saviour to submit to a baptism that was intended and purposed for sinners? What was Christ's purpose for coming into the world (Matthew 1:21; Luke 5:30-32; 19:10; John 3:17; 1 Timothy 1:15)? Therefore,

it was proper and right for the Saviour, at the beginning of His public ministry, to identify with those He came to save. He humbled Himself and was willing to associate and identify with sinners, though He Himself knew no sin. He was willing to stand in the same place as sinners and to put Himself alongside of all the sinful ones for whom John's baptism was designed.

The prophet Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). The New Testament teaches that "in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17). Though sinless, He was able to sympathize with His brethren in their struggle with sin: He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Not only at His baptism, but throughout His public ministry, the compassionate Lord Jesus identified and associated with those He had come to redeem. The self-righteous Pharisees strongly criticized the righteous Christ because of such associations. Consider these passages:

1. Luke 5:27-32. What was the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees?
2. Luke 7:36-50. What was the reaction of Simon the Pharisee?
3. Luke 15:1-2. What was the reaction of the Pharisees and scribes? Does this help in understanding why Christ told them the parable of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son?
4. Luke 19:1-10. What was the reaction of the people (verse 7)?
5. Luke 7:29-35. What did the Pharisees and lawyers think of John's baptism? Were they baptized by John? Would it have been *right* for Jesus to refuse John's baptism, just like the self-righteous Pharisees?

The Pharisees said (compare Luke 7:30), "Don't permit us to be baptized, for we are righteous!"
[They were SELF-RIGHTEOUS.]

The tax collectors and sinners said (compare Luke 7:29), "Permit us to be baptized, for God is righteous and we are sinful."

Jesus said (compare Matthew 3:15), "Permit Me to be baptized, for it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness."

About three and a half years after His baptism, Christ would experience yet another baptism (see Matthew 20:22-23; Luke 12:50) where He would even more fully identify with sinners:

The Baptism Of Jesus At The Jordan	The Baptism Of Jesus At The Cross
1) Christ should not have been baptized (Matthew 3:14). He was sinless and perfectly righteous.	1) Christ should not have gone to the cross (1 Peter 3:18). He was the Just and Righteous One. He was not guilty.
2) He was not a sinner.	2) He was not a sinner (1 Peter 2:22-24).
3) He did not deserve this baptism.	3) He did not deserve this death (Luke 23:40-41).
4) He submitted to the baptism and stood in the sinner's place.	4) He submitted to the death of a cross and stood in the sinner's place (Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 5:21).
5) In this baptism, Jesus symbolically identified with sinners.	5) In this baptism, Jesus actually identified with sinners, and became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

Not only did John the Baptist bear witness (point to Jesus), but heaven stepped in and God the Father pointed out His beloved Son: "And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). A similar declaration was made from heaven at the time of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5--notice the added words, "Hear ye Him"). We know very little about our Lord's childhood, His teen years and the years when He was in His twenties. But we do know that God was well pleased with His Son throughout these thirty some years.

The Temptation of Christ

Being tempted to sin is the common experience of each one of us. This passage is highly instructive as we learn how Christ gained complete victory. The Lord Jesus stands and stays true amidst all of the attacks. All of the attacks fail.

How did Christ defeat Satan? Did He win the victory by His divine supernatural powers as the Son of God? Did He rely upon His divine omnipotence to put the devil to flight? This is not what the Bible teaches. The Lord faced Satan as a Man. The temptation of Christ was a wonderful demonstration that man, walking in the Spirit, and using and relying upon the Word of God, is more than a match for Satan! This demonstration brings great comfort to our hearts as we study and

meditate on the methods our Lord used to defeat Satan's attacks.

Notice how the Lord Jesus depended upon the Spirit of God and His leading. The Spirit led Him (Matthew 4:1). He was "full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke 4:1). See also Mark 1:12 (He was driven by the Spirit).

Notice how the Lord Jesus used the Word of God to overcome each temptation: "It is written" (Matthew 4:4,7,10; quoting each time from the book of Deuteronomy). God's Word is so important if we are to have victory over sin: "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11).

Can you think of others who overcame temptation and gained the victory over sin? Joseph in Genesis 39 is a prime example.

Can you think of those who were overcome by temptation? David in 2 Samuel 11 is a prime example.

Remember that temptation is not equivalent to sin. You can set a trap for a mouse but this does not mean the mouse is going to take the bait. You can bait your fishing hook, but this does not mean the fish is going to go for the worm. Temptation will come, but temptation does not necessarily lead to sin. How we handle temptation is the real issue. The Lord was tempted but He did not sin. Joseph was tempted by a wicked woman, but he did not sin. David was tempted and he did fall into sin.

Compare Matthew 4:11 with James 4:7. Submit to the Son and the devil will run!

The Good News of the Kingdom

The great message which John preached (Matthew 3:2) is repeated by the Lord Jesus (4:17). "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Kingdom was near and the Jews needed to make sure their hearts were prepared. The King Himself announced the nearness of the Kingdom. In the next three chapters (Matthew 5-7), the Lord would help the people understand the spiritual requirements which were necessary in order to enter the Kingdom.

What spiritual requirement did our Lord set forth in John 3:3,5 for seeing and entering the Kingdom of God?

The Jews responded to the material benefits of Christ's ministry, such as the miraculous healings (Matthew 4:23-25), but most had little interest in the spiritual benefits which the King could provide. Cancer is serious and can cause physical death, but the cancer of sin is far more serious. Heart disease can be fatal but there is another heart problem which is far worse (Jeremiah 17:9). Having a repentant heart is the only way that we will receive Him and know Him and be ready for His Kingdom. This leads to the next section where God points to the

need for each person to be "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5: 3). When we recognize how poor and bankrupt we really are, we can then appreciate the riches that God has for those who trust in Him.

Notes for Further Study

Matthew 3:2. The "kingdom of heaven" is one of the key phrases in Matthew's Gospel. See Matthew 5:3,10,19,20. The Jewish people were expecting a King (their Messiah) and they were expecting a Kingdom, the very Kingdom which was described by all the prophets. John offered no explanation of this Kingdom because he expected his audience to understand its nature. "The absence of any formal definition of the Kingdom in its initial announcement indicates that the Jewish hearers were expected to know exactly what Kingdom was meant" (Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pages 276-277). The Jews knew, according to Daniel 2:44, that the God of heaven would set up a Kingdom which would never be destroyed. This is the Kingdom of heaven. John's Kingdom message was repeated by the Lord Jesus (4:17) and by the twelve (10:5-7). Why does Matthew use the expression "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God"? Matthew was writing to Jews who sometimes tended to avoid mentioning the name of God. "Heaven" is a substitute for the God of heaven as in Matthew 23:22 where "swear by heaven" is equivalent to "swear by God."

Matthew 3:3. Isaiah's prophecy pointing to John the Baptist is found in Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3. The book of Isaiah, in some ways, is like a miniature Bible. There are sixty-six chapters in the book of Isaiah, just as there are sixty-six books in the Bible. The book of Isaiah is divided into two major parts: Part 1 (chapters 1-39) and Part 2 (chapters 40-66). Part 1 has 39 chapters just like the Old Testament; Part 2 has 27 chapters just like the New Testament. Also Isaiah 40 (the first chapter of Part 2) begins the same way as the New Testament begins, with John the Baptist (Isaiah 40:3)! Compare Mark 1:3.

Matthew 3:6—There is a difference between John's baptism described here and Christian baptism which first took place in Acts 2:41. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Christian baptism is a public testimony of a person's faith in the crucified and risen Christ and it pictures the believer's identification with Christ in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11). The fact that these two baptisms are not identical is proven in Acts 19:1-5 and compare Acts 18:24-26.

Matthew 3:7. Notice John's very forceful non-ecumenical statement. Notice also how John preached the wrath of God and coming judgment (see also verses 10-12).

Matthew 3:8. Many today (especially "Lordship salvation" advocates) tend to confuse repentance with the fruits of repentance. The former involves a change of mind; the latter involves a change of life. The two are related but should be

differentiated.

Matthew 3:10. Compare Matthew 7:17-19. If something is wrong with the fruit, then this indicates that something is wrong with the root.

Matthew 3:11. John predicted a unique coming of the Holy Spirit. The Jews knew that in connection with the coming Kingdom, God made this promise: "I will put my Spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:27; 39:29). This was part of God's new covenant provisions. When the Jews heard John announce a baptism of the Spirit, they probably thought of these prophecies. Israel as a nation rejected Christ and the Kingdom was postponed. The new covenant promises will still be fulfilled when the Kingdom is eventually established. However, 50 days after the resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit did come upon the Jewish believers in a very unique way (Acts 1:5) and later upon Gentile believers (Acts 11:15-16). In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Spirit baptism is defined as that work of God whereby believers are baptized or placed into the body of Christ which is His Church. Spirit baptism first took place on the Day of Pentecost, the day on which the Church began.

Matthew 4:1. The temptation took place immediately after the baptism. God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," and right after this Satan attacked. Application: If God is pleased with you, then you can be sure that the devil will not be and you can expect Satanic opposition. Those who are Christ's friends (John 15:14) are Satan's enemies. Never forget the truth of 1 John 4:4.

Matthew 4:4. Everything which God has said is important and vital. Every verse in the Bible is important. May God help us to be diligent students of His Word, and of every part of His Word.

Matthew 4:6. Even the devil says, "It is written." Even the devil can quote Scripture for his own purposes. There are members of certain cults who quote from the Bible all the time, and yet their doctrine is Satanic.

Matthew 4:8-9. There is a sense in which the kingdoms of this world belong to Satan. He is the "prince (ruler) of this world" (John 16:11). A future day is coming when the kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of Christ and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

Matthew 4:18-22. It cost something for these fishermen to follow Christ. They left their boat (their business) and they left their families. Later Peter would say to Jesus, "Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee" (Mark 10:28). Discipleship is costly, but the rewards are eternal.

Matthew 4:19. The key to "fishing for men" is to follow Christ, that is, to stay close to Him and walk in obedience. Personal evangelism must be based on personal holiness and personal devotion to the Saviour.

Matthew 4:23-24. These healings were spectacular. There was no disease that He could not heal (verse 23) and He healed all who came to Him (verse 24). Often faith healers today use this excuse: "I did not heal you because you did not have enough faith." But the Lord Jesus healed all whether they had faith or not. Those who claim to have miraculous healing abilities today need to understand that their so-called gift is nothing compared to the gift of healing which Christ and the apostles had. Ask the modern faith healer to go into the nearest hospital and heal every patient no matter what the ailment might be (cancer, heart disease, broken bones, etc.). This is essentially equivalent to what Christ did. If there were hospitals in Christ's day He would have emptied them. Compare Matthew 12:15 and Luke 6:19 where it says that Jesus "healed them all." Also it should be noted that the healing miracles provided evidence that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (see Isaiah 35:5-6).