

SESSION 1

Affirmation

MATTHEW 3:13–4:11

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE FATHER'S PLAN OF SALVATION.



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Think back to the last time you started a new job. Perhaps you felt excitement as well as apprehension. If you went through a new employee orientation, those feelings of apprehension may have been dispelled—or they may have heightened. They might have lingered until the first words of affirmation came out of the mouth of your boss. Words of encouragement are important in any new endeavor.

WHY DO YOU THINK WORDS OF AFFIRMATION ARE SO IMPORTANT
WHEN YOU EMBARK ON A NEW ENDEAVOR?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the three Synoptic Gospels, along with Mark and Luke. The word *synoptic* means “with the same eye” or from the same viewpoint. These three Gospel accounts follow a similar order of events and contain many of the same teachings of Jesus. The fourth Gospel, John, approaches the ministry and teaching of Jesus from a different viewpoint. All four Gospels, though, are the account of God’s intervention in history to provide His redemption to sinful humanity through His Son.

Matthew began his Gospel with the announcement and birth of Jesus. The account of Jesus’s ministry begins in chapter 3, some thirty years later. In rapid succession, Matthew tells of three key events that launched Jesus’s ministry—the appearance of John the Baptist, Jesus’s baptism, and His temptation in the wilderness.

John the Baptist is introduced in chapter 3. While John the Baptist’s central purpose was to direct attention to the coming Messiah, we must not lose sight of the fact that

John was a mighty prophet. In fact, he was the first prophet in over four hundred years among the Jewish people. As a result, the Jewish people turned out in great numbers to see and hear John.

John played two roles in God’s plan of redemption. First, he was a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Prophecy concerning John is found in Malachi 3:1, “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me.” Second, John was a herald of the good news that God’s Messiah had arrived. His preaching called for people to prepare for the Messiah through repentance and a baptism that illustrated repentance. Continually, John called attention to the fact that “one . . . more powerful” than him was coming.



3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be **baptized** **A** by him. **14** But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?” **15** Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us **to fulfill all righteousness.**” **B** Then John allowed him to be baptized. **16** When Jesus was baptized, he **went up** **C** immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. **17** And a **voice** **D** from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by **the devil.** **E** **2** After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” **4** He answered, “**It is written:**” **F** Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the **pinnacle of the temple,** **G** **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” **7** Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not **test** **H** the Lord your God.” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” **11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

A. John baptized those who repented from sin. Jesus had no need for that, but His baptism signifies full obedience to God’s purposes.

B. Jesus did not contradict John’s assessment. Rather, He affirmed that His own baptism was necessary for full obedience.

C. Matthew’s wording suggests complete immersion. The repetition of the Greek word *baptizo* supports this view of baptism.

D. Each member of the Trinity appears in this setting. The coming of the Spirit and the Father’s verbal approval of His “beloved Son” affirmed Jesus’s messianic mission.

E. Greek, *diabolos*. Satan roams the earth as God’s enemy, accusing believers and attacking their faith (Job 1:6-7; Zech. 3:1-2; Luke 22:31).

F. Satan struck at a point of physical weakness, but Jesus responded with the power of God’s Word—not once, but three times.

G. “Highest point” (NIV). Likely, the southeast corner of the temple complex overlooking the Kidron Valley hundreds of feet below.

H. “Tempt” (KJV). The Greek wording suggests deliberately provoking or challenging someone. Here, the idea is “forcing” God to prove Himself.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Obeying God

(Matt. 3:13-17)

Believers are called to demonstrate obedience through baptism by immersion.

- **Why did Jesus come to John for baptism?**
- **What is the purpose of baptism in a believer's life?**

2. Hearing God

(Matt. 4:1-4)

We can rely on Scripture to find strength and resist temptation.

- **How have you found strength and encouragement in God's Word?**

3. Trusting God

(Matt. 4:5-7)

We can trust God's faithfulness without demanding miracles.

- **What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture?**

4. Worshiping God

(Matt. 4:8-11)

We must acknowledge God alone as worthy of our worship.

- **What challenges our worship of God alone? How can we overcome those challenges?**

Apply the Text

- **There is strength in numbers. How can your group members support and encourage one another as they face life's temptations? How can you build accountability in your group?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Baptism

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. (See Acts 2:41-42; Romans 6:3-5.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

Make a chart with two columns. Title one column "Temptations" and the second column "Responses." In the first column, describe aspects of each of Satan's temptations. Do the same with Jesus's responses in the second column. List ways Satan tempts believers today. Find Scripture you can use to meet each of the listed temptations.



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.



TALK IT OUT

Focus on Matthew 3:17. What did God the Father affirm about Jesus?

Verse 17 reveals the relationship of the Father and the Son. It's also the first of three times in the Gospels that God spoke from heaven. The other times are at Jesus's transfiguration (Matt. 17:5) and after Jesus's prayer that God's name be glorified (John 12:28). The Father's words in verse 17 reveal His evaluation of Jesus. The Greek word translated "well-pleased" means to take pleasure or find satisfaction in.

Why do you think God affirmed Jesus in an audible voice?

Jesus's submission to baptism (Matt. 3:13-16) and the Father's affirmation set the stage for the beginning of His public ministry. The next event, Jesus's temptations by the devil (4:1-11), would test His commitment to the Father's plan. When our lives are connected to Jesus, we can know that we are a part of God's plan to save people from their sin—we join Jesus in His mission.

How does your life express your commitment to God's plan for you?

As you work on memorizing Matthew 3:17 this week, remember to express to Jesus your pleasure in Him.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 3:13-15

Consider the reasons Jesus was baptized.

Matthew introduced the Messiah with a simple statement: “Then Jesus came from Galilee.” He came purposefully to the Jordan River from Nazareth (Mark 1:9) to be baptized by John. This baptism was the climax of John’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’s ministry. From this point forward, John would decrease, and Jesus would increase (John 3:30).

John’s message was repentance demonstrated through baptism (Matt. 3:2). Thus he was surprised when Jesus came to be baptized by him. Most likely, John knew of Jesus’s divine identity. No doubt, John’s parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, had shared with him the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:39-45). At first, John resisted the request from Jesus. “No, I need to be baptized by you” was an admission by John of his own sinfulness. But Jesus stated that His own baptism by John was necessary as “the way . . . to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus, fully God and fully man, was baptized to identify with the sinfulness of humanity. Jesus also was identifying Himself with the ministry of John, the forerunner of the Messiah, linking their ministries together. Finally, Jesus’s baptism demonstrated His commitment to fulfill the mission for which He came into the world. It was an act of obedience to the Father and gives us an example of obedience.

What step of obedience to God do you need to take?



Day 2: Matthew 3:16-17

Note the biblical mode of baptism.

Based on the language in verse 16, Jesus’s baptism was by immersion. The Greek word baptized means to “dip or submerge under water.” It is a word that was used in ancient Greek literature of a boat that was sunk in battle. The mode of immersion paints the picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Immersion is the biblical form of baptism. For example, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him,” then “they came up out of the water” (Acts 8:38-39).

Immediately following Jesus’s baptism, the heavens opened and two signs of God’s affirmation of His Son appeared. First, there was a symbol like a dove descending on Jesus. Note the word *like*. This was not a dove but something like a dove; it was a symbol of the Spirit of God on Jesus. Second, God the Father spoke words of affirmation describing Jesus as His beloved Son in whom He was well-pleased. At the baptism of Jesus is clearly pictured God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity are distinct but without division of nature or essence.

How would you explain to someone the meaning of baptism?



Day 3: Matthew 4:1-4

Compare Matthew 4:4 to Deuteronomy 8:3.

At the outset of His ministry, Jesus faced the issue of what kind of Messiah He would be. Popular opinion believed the Messiah would free the Jews from Rome. But God's plan was different. The Messiah would come to save us from our sins. Jesus was determined to carry out the Father's plan. This resolve, however, would be tested.

After fasting for "forty days and forty nights," Jesus "was hungry." The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that He was human as well as divine. It was at this moment, when Jesus perhaps was most vulnerable, that the devil sought to sidetrack God's plan of redemption.

Notice that the devil didn't doubt that Jesus is God. Instead, he implied: "Use your powers for your own benefit. After all, you're God." This was a temptation to use His powers to meet His own needs rather than trust in God's provision.

Jesus responded to Satan's attack by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. He affirmed that our physical needs are not our most crucial needs. The Word of God and the will of God as revealed in His Word are the most important things in all of life. This was Jesus's declaration of commitment to God's plan. Further, His example of using Scripture, the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), serves to remind us that we can face temptation with the Word of God.

How have you found strength and encouragement in God's Word?



Day 4: Matthew 4:5-7

Compare Matthew 4:7 to Deuteronomy 6:16.

Jesus defeated Satan in round one by quoting the Word of God. Satan now tried to turn the tables on Jesus by using the Word of God himself. His implication was: "Jesus, if you believe so strongly in Scripture, then use it to prove that You are the Son of God." Quoting from Psalm 91:11-12, Satan challenged Jesus to throw Himself off the top of the temple. "After all, God's Word says He will protect you and you won't be injured. That will prove that you are God's Son!" Jumping from the height of 450 feet would be such a spectacular occurrence in the eyes of the temple worshipers that they would immediately realize Jesus was the Messiah.

What is notable is that Satan misused Scripture. The psalm speaks of a life lived in God's will. When our lives are lived in His will, God can be counted on to protect and provide for us.

Quoting this time from Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus spoke of the danger of presuming on God to watch over us when we venture outside of His plan for our lives. The lesson is simple: don't attempt to put God in a position where He has to come through for you. Don't box Him in a corner and expect Him to act as you desire.

What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? What biblical truths about God can you always count on?



Day 5: Matthew 4:8-11

Compare Matthew 4:10 to Deuteronomy 6:13.

The devil took Jesus to a tall mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. These kingdoms represented the governments and world systems that God allows Satan to rule. Their splendor would represent that which was glitzy and appealing about all the worldly things these kingdoms possessed. These would be Satan's to give since he was the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31).

Satan tempts Christians today using the same tactics. He attempts to seduce us with promises of success, prosperity, and health. The price, however, involves selling out to him.

Jesus did not need what the devil was offering. The kingdoms of this world were rightfully His already. The kingdoms and the glory would be His because of His death and resurrection (Rev. 11:15). What Satan was offering Jesus was a shortcut that avoided the cross. Satan was offering a way for Jesus to be "King of kings" without suffering the pain and humiliation of the cross.

Again, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus told Satan to "Get lost. God alone is worthy of worship and service." Satan only has power by God's permission. Therefore, at Jesus's command to go away, Satan had no choice but to leave.

After Satan's departure, God sent angels to meet the physical needs of Jesus that He had refused to do for Himself in verse 4.

**What challenges your worship of God alone?
How can you overcome those challenges?**

APPLY THE TEXT

The psalmist said this: "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). How can you apply this verse in your life? Develop a plan and strategy for memorizing Scripture that will help you stand against temptation. Start by memorizing Matthew 3:17.

JOURNAL

