

Lesson 6

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY

When Jesus is about thirty years old he prepares for his ministry. The first action appears to be his baptism as recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22. We used Mathew's version in the lesson about Jesus and his family. Now we will use Luke's version because it adds an interesting fact. ²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, 'Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.'" Notice the first phrase. Jesus was humble enough to wait and be at the end of the line for His baptism. Are we that humble in our daily lives?

What is new? All of them tell of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in bodily form and the voice from heaven saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, with thee I am well pleased." What is new is the statement that Jesus was praying. He is about to begin a very difficult mission with temptations, misrepresentations, rejections, harassments, betrayal, and finally crucifixion. He was, I expect, praying for strength, patience, and determination to fulfill his mission. We could learn a lot from that. We need to be praying, from the beginning, and daily, that our faith will not waver, temptations will not overcome us, and that we will remain faithful to the end.

The temptations of Jesus reminds me of Job. Has Satan asked for a chance to test Jesus under extreme circumstances? We will never know. But for whatever reason following his baptism Matthew writes, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward 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 proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:1-4. "Jesus' answer: Deuteronomy 8:3".

"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 give his angels charge of you, and On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Matthew 4:5-7. "Jesus' answer: Deuteronomy 6:16."

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 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, 'Begone, 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 ministered to him." Matthew 4:8-11. "Jesus' answer: Deuteronomy 6:13."

Jesus knew right from wrong and used scriptures to back his decisions. Do we know Jesus and his teachings well enough to always make the right choice? Temptations will keep coming. Luke wrote, “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” Luke 4:13.

Mark adds an interesting statement, “And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.” Mark 1:12-13. What did the angels do? Jesus must have slept a lot in his weakened condition. The angels may have protected him from the wild beasts. I think of more importance may have been the feeding and nursing Jesus back to strength when the fast was over.

When I was in the tenth grade, one of our teachers had a son who was in the Bataan death march during World War II. Thousands died on the march and many, many more died in the prison camps. Our teacher did not know whether her son was dead or alive. One Friday she happily told us that they had been liberated and her son was alive. The class cheered. The next Monday she sadly told us that he was dead. The army, not knowing better, let those starving men eat whatever they wanted. Many of them died. From that, they learned that they should have been nursed back slowly and carefully. The angels ministered to Jesus correctly.

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” Luke 4:14-15.

The next verses were used in the lesson on John the Baptist because they involve both men. The last time John saw Jesus was when John baptized Jesus and saw the Spirit come down on him and a voice from heaven saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well-pleased.” Matthew 3:13-17. John later said that was how he knew Jesus was the Messiah. This time when he sees Jesus coming he says, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29. And he added many other things that convinced his followers that Jesus was truly the Messiah.

“The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples; ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ And they said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ ³⁹ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, ‘So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).” John 1:35-42.

One of the two who followed Jesus might have been John (later the apostle) who would never mention his own name. The other was Andrew who recruited Peter. This gives Jesus his first three followers.

“The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow me.’⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!’⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, ‘Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.’⁵¹ And he said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.’”
John 1:43-51.

This makes five disciples who evidently go with him back to Galilee where they spend some time with his family. They are all invited to a wedding at Cana. This is where Jesus, at the request of his mother, performed his first miracle. That event was covered in the lesson about Jesus and his family and will not be repeated here. The family mentioned was his mother and brothers. It seems reasonable that his sisters are married and have families of their own. We have already mentioned that Joseph was thought to be dead.

Some time later Jesus decides to go to the Passover in Jerusalem. “In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business.¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, ‘Take these things away; you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade.’” John 2:14-16. The ruling Jews were very upset and demanded a sign to prove he had the right to do this. Jesus’ answer was, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.” John 2:19. Jesus was talking about his body but they thought he was talking about the physical temple and would later use it against him at his trial.

Why did Jesus do this at this point in his ministry? To use an example from an old Western movie, He was announcing, “There’s a new sheriff in town and the corruption must go.”

Some people think this is the same incident as the one at the end of his temple teaching. Not so, I call them the bookends of Jesus’ temple ministry. The ruling Jews were angry this time. When Jesus does it again, he knows that they will be so furious that they will demand his crucifixion. That was the sacrifice that he came to this world to make.

What are we willing to sacrifice to be a disciple of Jesus?