

Synopsis & Context – Session #23 – Jesus' Ministry Begins

Eccentric is too mild a description for John the Baptist who wore odd clothes and lacked both a sense of tact and a balanced diet. His message, though, was right in step with a long line of prophetic predecessors. He called for Israel's repentance and baptized the penitent in the Jordan River.

Although prominent in all four, John is portrayed somewhat differently in each of the four Gospels. Generally we see John never at a loss for words, but seemingly awestruck when Jesus came to be baptized by *him*. Details shift, but the basis premise that follows is that the Spirit of God came to rest on Jesus as in the form of a dove. A voice – the voice of God – is then heard broadcasting His divine approval. The Spirit then led Jesus to a lonely wilderness, where he spent the next 40 days in prayer, meditation and fasting, as well as being tempted by Satan, the enemy of God. He confronted Satan's evil allurements and proved Himself obedient to the Father and triumphant over sin.

John the Baptist denied claims that he was Messiah, pointing to Jesus and announcing, *"Look, the Lamb of God."* Accounts of the calling of the disciples differ. In John's account, Andrew heard John's message and rushed to tell his brother, Simon Peter, and others that Messiah had come. Above the details, Jesus gathers His band of followers and begins teaching and showing them marvelous words and miraculous ways. The Gospel according to John records Jesus' first miracle taking place when He goes to a wedding in Cana with his mother, Mary, and his disciples. The wine runs out, so Mary turned to Jesus to remedy the embarrassing state of affairs. Jesus simply instructs the servants to fill six jars with water and serve the guests. When they did, the guests marvel that finest wine had been kept such a secret until now.

The disciples become increasingly aware that Jesus is more than a rabbi, but clearly they don't put everything together. A religious leader called Nicodemus has a clandestine encounter with Jesus to find some answers. Jesus' simple reply is, *"You must be 'born again'of the Spirit. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Again in John, Jesus has a similar conversation with a Samaritan woman who had come to draw water from a well. With her, he speaks of 'living water,' but the message is the same: accept His gift and be saved. When she mentions the Messiah, Jesus confirmed His identity. She believes and shares the news with her entire village, as the second missionary of the new Messiah.

Jesus travels the area, teaching in the synagogues and healing the people. He cast out demons and cleansed socially exiled lepers. The crowds grew and so did His critics. On one occasion, four men dug through the roof of a house so they could bring their paralytic friend to Him. Before he heals him, Jesus forgives the man, while the religious teachers grew indignant over such claims. But Jesus validates His authority by commanding the paralytic to get up and walk. The Pharisees miss the miracle and were incensed that Jesus had violated tradition by healing on the Sabbath.

This Sabbath infringement, coupled with his absurd claim to be the Messiah Himself, on top of his questionable social circles, quickly turns the religious power establishment against Him. And so the conspiracy to kill Jesus begins. While many debated, questioned, and wondered about Jesus' identity, one thing was certain: Jesus is controversial. Some see hope, but others hated Him and want only to be rid of Him. John the Baptist, now languishing in prison, begins to doubt as well, demonstrating that even the best of us have our faith tested under difficult circumstances. But throughout this chapter, His baptism, His triumph over temptation, His miracles, and His message confirm Him as the long expected One who confounds expectations, is drawn to the least and the lost, and whose message is indeed for all.



Chapter 23: Jesus' Ministry Begins is 'woven' from selections from *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*

Matthew 3—4, 11; Mark 1—3; Luke 8; John 1—4

Jesus' ministry was announced and endorsed by John the Baptist, one of the most significant figures in Judea at that time. The four evangelists emphasized not only Jesus' message, miracles, and atoning death, but how he lived his life in full accordance with God's will, the life we were meant to live. Jesus' message was authenticated with miracles. The primary opposition to Jesus' ministry (and that of John before him) came from the religious leaders of the day.

In the closing verses of his gospel, John commented that it would be impossible to write down everything Jesus said and did. In other words, the gospel writers have done more than present the eyewitness testimonies of the life of Jesus in written form. The details of his life and ministry have been selected and arranged to communicate something specific and significant. Each of the four Gospels has a distinct contribution to make to our understanding of Jesus.

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

Matthew

Ch. 3— Proclamation of John the Baptist; the Baptism of Jesus

Ch. 4 – The Temptation of Jesus; Jesus' ministry begins in Galilee; Jesus calls the first disciples; ministers to the crowds of people

Ch. 11 – Messengers from John the Baptist; Woes to Unrepentant Cities; Jesus thanks His Father

Mark

Ch. 1 – Proclamation of John the Baptist; the Baptism of Jesus; Temptation of Jesus; Jesus' ministry begins in Galilee; Jesus calls the first disciples; the man with an unclean spirit; Jesus heals many at Simon's house; a preaching tour in Galilee; Jesus cleanses a leper

Ch. 2 – Jesus heals a paralytic; Jesus calls Levi; the question about fasting; pronouncement about the Sabbath;

Ch. 3— The man with a withered hand; a multitude at the seaside; Jesus appoints the twelve; Jesus and Beelzebul; the true kindred of Jesus

Luke

Ch. 8 – Some women accompany Jesus; the Parable of the Sower; a lamp under a jar; the true kindred of Jesus; Jesus calms a storm; Jesus heals a Gerasene Demoniac; a girl restored to life and a woman healed;

John

Ch. 1— Prologue; testimony of John the Baptist; the Lamb of God; the first disciples of Jesus; Jesus calls Phillip and Nathanael

Ch. 2— The wedding at Cana; Jesus cleanses the Temple;

Ch. 3— Nicodemus visits Jesus; Jesus and John the Baptist; the One who comes from Heaven

Ch. 4 – Jesus and the woman from Samaria; Jesus returns to Galilee; Jesus heals an official's son

God's Story – YOUR story!

- **What is new or different in this part of the Story that you may not have noticed before?**
(e.g., Is John the Baptist presented differently at all to you?)
- **What exchange that Jesus has is the most challenging for you?**
- **Which scene gives you the most inspiration and hope?**
- **Can doubt and faith coexist?**
- **What do you think erodes, hinders or even destroys faith? How is that exemplified in the Gospel?**