



"The Way"

Session 1 – Baptism and Temptation

February 25, 2024 4:00 PM

Opening Prayer

Lord, we pray not for tranquility, nor that our tribulations may cease; we pray for thy spirit and thy love, that thou grant us strength and grace to overcome adversity; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

(from Girolama Savonarola, 15th century reformer)

Session 1 – Jesus' Baptism and Temptation

The story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River by John and the subsequent temptations in the wilderness is told in Matthew 3:1 – 4:11, Mark 1:1-13, and in Luke 3:1-22 and 4:1-13. While the accounts may differ in detail, the general thrust of the stories is the same. John's Gospel describes Jesus' baptism in John 1:19-34, but does not relate the temptation in the same way as the Synoptic Gospels. Remember, the Gospel were written at least a generation after the events they describe. Recall also that the Gospel writers were not attempting to write history; instead, they were writing theology – that is, an account of Jesus' teachings and actions and the meaning of these for people everywhere.

Opening Questions...

- Have you ever been baptized? If so, do you remember the details – the who, where, when, why? What does baptism mean to you?
- Let's think about temptation. On your notecard, write down a "temptation" that you are currently facing or one that you have struggled with in the past. How did/are you responding to this temptation? Is your Christian faith coming into play as you face this temptation? Why? How?

Session 1 Video

Follow Up Questions...

The geography of the Holy Land has often been called the fifth Gospel, because the land played such an important part in the life and ministry of Jesus.

- What surprised you about anything you saw in this video?
- Consider the Jordan River, is this the way you had pictured it in your mind's eye?
- Did the video depiction of the wilderness match your expectations? How was the video different?
- What do you conclude about the reality of the wilderness?

Scripture Focus: Jesus' Baptism

Let's Read Matthew 3:1 – 17.

- Hamilton writes that the baptism of Jesus was a way of identifying with sinners. What does Jesus' baptism mean for us today? Does Jesus still identify with us as sinners?
- What must we do in order to become God's beloved children?
- Can we lose our status as God's beloved children? How?
- If you were baptized, in what ways is it a defining act for you? How can you make it a defining act in your life from now on?

The baptism of Jesus was not for Jesus' sake but for ours. This is why Martin Luther continually reminded himself that he was baptized – that is, a beloved child of God – not because of what he, Luther, had done but because of what God had done. This is why frequent reaffirmation of baptism is so important for contemporary Christians.

Scripture Focus: Jesus' Temptation/Wilderness Experience

Let's Read Matthew 4:1-11.

- Why was Jesus' experience of temptation important for his ministry? Why is his temptation important for us today?
- Could Jesus have been the Christ without this temptation experience? (Remember that the Gospel of John does not have this story.)
- What does the temptation story add to the reality of Jesus Christ for us today?

Hamilton in Chapter 1 gives an explanation and meaning of the temptations (pages 37 – 42). The first temptation, food for his hunger, speaks to our basic human need. This first temptation takes us back to the Garden of Eden and the tempter's first temptation with the forbidden fruit. Additional Old Testament stories, centered on food, speak of the desire for instant gratification that led to a profound loss of blessing. The first temptation connected Jesus to the people of old, but also to our basic human desires. Jesus' response to the devil when tempted by the food was a quote from Moses in Deuteronomy 8:3: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Jesus' second temptation was to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple. It could be understood in two ways: it may represent the nearly universal tendency to win friends by acting foolishly or the tendency to test fate (or give up when the road seems too tough, suicide). Jesus, instead, chose to

see the difficult journey ahead through the eyes of faith, realizing that God would redeem his suffering – and he did not jump.

The third temptation is the archetypal temptation to sell one's soul for wealth or power. Similar to the first, this goes far beyond because it drives so many in the world today. If Jesus would bow down to the devil, he could have it all. If he had, the world would continue to march toward self-destruction. Jesus' response, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only!'" Jesus was angry, because he knew the lure of this temptation for each of us.

We all have moments when we wrestle with the devil, when we wrestle with temptation. Jesus countered these tempting thoughts and rebuked the tempter by quoting scripture. Jesus' temptations in the wilderness were meant to test his resolve, not with the aim of weakening him, but in order to strengthen him. It's comforting to know that Jesus felt the power of these temptations.

- What forms do temptations take in our culture? Media? Neighbor's successes? Other's actions? Etc.?
- Are all temptations equal in seriousness? Is the temptation to eat a second doughnut as serious as the temptation to pass on gossip that might hurt another person? Is the temptation to cheat on your taxes as serious as saying nothing when the salesclerk gives you too much change?
- Is resisting temptation easier when the consequences, such as being caught, are obvious?
- Hamilton asserts that we are tempted not to do the right thing as often as we are tempted to do the wrong thing. Is this true for you?
- Is failing to do the right thing as serious as doing the wrong thing?

Wrap Up

Both the baptism and the wilderness experience were defining incidents in the life and ministry of Jesus. For us, baptism and the struggle with temptation can also be defining moments. Ponder these questions in a few moments of silence...

1. Does baptism define me as beloved by God in such a way that I live out that love?
2. Does my response to temptation define me as one who trusts in God and seeks to express God's love in all that I am and all that I do?

Reflect on these questions. If you are struggling with temptation, surrender it to God today. Know that you are loved by God – His forgiveness and His grace.

We will then close by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.



Session 2 – The Healing Ministry, Capernaum

Sunday, March 3 4:00 PM

Chapter 2 in the Book
