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## Introduction

Welcome to the New Normal Series Guide. We have all heard the phrase “the New Normal” as it relates to our current and future Covid-related lives. None of us are too excited about what the future holds and how things are changing, but we are learning to lean into whatever the new normal will be. While we don’t know exactly how things will look, we do know that we can never go back to the same life we were leading before. Whether masks are here to stay, social distancing will become the new rule of our social lives, or perhaps working from home will be the norm rather than the exception, things will be different.

But for those of us who call ourselves followers of Christ, we know that there has been a “New Normal” for us for the last two millennia. Jesus came and ushered in a different kind of life, a different kind of worldview, and a different kind of compassion. His Gospel was the good news of love, the salvation for all humankind, and the desire for a new kind of community, one that accepted all, including those who had been marginalized from the greater society. This message still rings true and is still as powerful today as it was in the first century.

While followers of Christ have not always done a great job at living this new normal, every day we have an opportunity to continue the gospel work of Jesus Christ by the way we live our lives, interact with people, seek justice, mercy and compassion, and help those living in the margins. Also, we have the opportunity to speak of the greatest love ever given to humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Our new normal is a privilege to live and experience. While it is easy to get distracted by everything that is happening in the world today, we must maintain a focus on that which transcends, on that which is eternal, and on that which will lift up our eyes beyond the idols and temples of this world and into heaven.

May this series guide be a healing balm to your soul, a bit of wisdom for your life, and a catalyst for your faith.

Grace to you, and Peace.

Pastor Timothy Gillespie

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Gillespie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

# WEEK 1

## MATTHEW 1:17-25 (NLT)

**17** Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

### Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

**18** This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about[a]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

**20** But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[c] because he will save his people from their sins.”

**22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”[d] (which means “God with us”).

**24** When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

**17 All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.**

**W**e can't start here without looking at what went before. But if you are like me, you see those lists of names and you quickly jump ahead to something more interesting. The lists of names and genealogies are usually left for biblical scholars who can make sense and find meaning. Most of us just jump right past them and know they are important, but we are not 100% sure why they are so important. And the genealogy found in Matthew is often no different.

One thing that we all know to be true is that the genealogy found in Matthew is one of the things that makes this gospel account a bit more Jewish in nature. While genealogies were rarely compiled with the concern for biological precision and completeness, as we would look at a family tree today, there was usually a point to each of these lists. They might have been to convey a sense of kinship, to make a hereditary claim to a religious or political office. Others work to tell a story of the history of a particular group of people.

Matthew wanted the world to know how Jesus fits into the story of Israel, and how that story actually belongs to Jesus. He is the apex of this history and the an-

chor point of their future. Therefore, Matthew uses this genealogy to show the world how Jesus is connected to David, to Abraham, and he even used symbolic numbers to make this happen.

As you can see, there is this idea that there were fourteen generations in each of these sections. These lists show a direct connection between Abraham and David, and of course, David and Jesus. However, it seems as if there were only 13 generations in the last section of this genealogy. This has created some concern, to be sure, but it is probably the fact that he assumed the last generation of Mary and Joseph would be put in by each person reading the genealogy. He did, however, use the symbolic number of 7 multiplied by 2 in the use of the 14 generations for each section. As well, the number 3 had significance, so these 3 sections of 14 generations become a way that Matthew is communicating his belief that Jesus was born at just the right time to fulfill God's promises.

One other note that should be discussed. This genealogy relates most closely with the genealogy found in Luke 3:32-38. However, there are some pretty significant differences when we try to harmonize these two accounts. Simply

put, they are different from each other. Again, we need to remind ourselves that compilers of genealogies in the ancient world were less concerned with accuracy than we are when it comes to our family trees. Rather, they sought to make a particular statement about the roots and the fruits of their subjects. Therefore, we don't study these geneal-

ogies to find out who is correct, but to discover what each one, in its own right, is saying about Jesus. Matthew is making a particularly Jewish case for Jesus, beginning with Abraham. Luke begins with Adam in order to make that case that Jesus is connected to the beginning of all humanity, and is therefore the savior of all humanity.

**1— What does your family tree look like, and what does it say about your place in it?**

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**2— Have you ever done a 23 and Me in order to find your particular makeup? Did it change the way you thought about yourself?**

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**3 — In this genealogy, it culminates in Jesus. Where would your genealogy culminate? And if it was in you, what would the rest of the story of your life be? One of grace and compassion, of success or failure; would it be one of faithfulness?**

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**18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

**W**ell, you know this story all too well. Why are spending time on this story if we are not in the Christmas season? When we encounter this story before the end of the year, it often feels out of place, a little strange, and perhaps a bit too fantastic to believe. To hear this story without the accoutrements of Christmas trees, carols, and even the cold just doesn't seem right.

However, this story is pretty important and it also stands as a stumbling block for many people. The story of Jesus does not begin with a reasonable proposition. Rather, it begins with a fulfillment of an age-old promise to an ancient people, and it recognizes the providence of God in every phrase and utterance. You have to begin the story by suspending disbelief in order to be able to continue reading. In some ways, this is a new normal for us. As humans, while we love to believe in the supernatural, we also (at least some of us) have a healthy dose of common sense, and this flies in the face of common sense.

When you go to a movie you know

that the premise is not true, so you suspend your disbelief, just for a while, so you can be brought into the story in a more powerful and palpable way. In some ways, we are asked to do this same thing at the very beginning of the Jesus story. There is not a foundation of "regular" in which we find ourselves. Rather, at the outset, we are asked to believe the impossible, by faith, in order to begin to believe that God is functioning in a very different reality than we are. This has implications for our worldview, for our belief in what CAN happen, and in our ultimate trajectory as human beings with the capacity for eternity through a relationship with Jesus. Because of these six words "while she was still a virgin," we are asked to assume a great deal of the impossible into this story.

Perhaps after 2,000 years, this new normal doesn't seem so fantastic. However, it truly is! It is probably too much to ask of people, but God asks this of us at the very outset of the narrative. There is a grace in this. He doesn't hide the incredible nature of the miracle; rather, he has the gospel author put it front and center

in the experience. There is no “bait and switch,” as they say. Rather, there is a truth that is put forward within the first few words of the story that Matthew is telling us.

Why is this important? Because we are not going to ask you to believe what used to be “normal.” Rather, we are going to ask you, from the very beginning of your encounter with Jesus, to believe what you normally wouldn’t. We are going to ask you to believe in the “super-normal” of Jesus, his life, death, res-

urrection and advocacy for you in heaven with the Father. From the idea of the trinity, or the community of God—three-in-one—to the conquering of death and sin, it is all overwhelming, uncommon, and the new normal. But we will ask you to come along for the ride, nonetheless, and we will not shy away from the fact that it goes beyond normal. In fact, we will lean into this new normal, because that is what Jesus did when he came to earth to save us.

Thanks for coming along for the ride!

**1— Do you have any unreasonable superstitions?**

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**2— How is believing in Jesus different than those?**

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**3 — What do you hope to gain from this series guide? What are your expectations?**

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**19 Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.**

**W**hat would you do if you found out the person you were engaged to was pregnant? Or for the women reading/hearing this series guide, if your fiancé seemingly had cheated on you, would you be as concerned for her/his reputation as Joseph seemed to be? Of course, the stakes were a great deal higher for Mary in the first century than they might be for us today. Shaming, exile, and even perhaps violence from her family were all relatively common occurrences in those days for a woman who was found pregnant out of wedlock. So his willingness to move toward compassion as a first response is really the shocking fact of this short verse.

Joseph, for all intents and purposes, is always presented to us as someone whose heart moves toward compassion as a first response. There is a sense that he truly does love Mary and wants what is best for her, while probably being deeply disappointed in her infidelity. However, he does not let that disappointment turn to anger or resentment; rather, he still wants what is best for her, regardless of how she treated him. The registering of his disappointment makes sense, but what doesn't make sense is his willing-

ness to continue to protect her in light of these circumstances.

I have often wondered what my response would be to such infidelity, especially on the eve of such an auspicious occasion as my own marriage. While it would have been much different in the first century, I would probably have been a teenager, and Mary even more so. Our families would have been much more involved, and I would have moved Mary into my home as soon as our engagement was secured. I still wonder if I would have been as gracious as Joseph intended to be. Of course, the gossip in the village would have been profound, and it would have been hard for Mary to endure, but at least Joseph decided not to publicly renounce Mary. I would hope that I could be so gracious in my response.

Joseph is immediately modeling what it means to live in the new normal. To react and respond to things differently than those who do not have a connection to the most high and graceful God. To lean towards grace and compassion, rather than spite and revenge. To speak a kind and gracious word, rather than anger and vitriol. There is a patience in the pause, a hope in the moment, and a

faithfulness that leads the conversation, rather than what follows the words on our tongue. The overflow of our heart exposes our true belief in the graciousness of God as opposed to the rush for anger that is so often exposed through the words on our lips. Joseph decided, before he even knew the greater narrative

of God's grace, that he would deal with Mary in a way that was the best for her in these difficult and even super-normal circumstances.

I wonder if I could have done that. I wonder if I do that in the little decisions that I make every day. I wonder if you do, as well.

**1— Do you lean toward grace or anger?**

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**2— Have you ever been in a circumstance where you had to choose grace or revenge?**

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**3 — How can you be an expression of God that shows someone how much He loves them today?**

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**20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.”**

**J**oseph took some time to make this decision. The text says “as he considered this...” which seems to indicate that he wasn’t rushing this decision. Sometimes, in the New Normal, we have to take some time to make a decision. Perhaps this is because we will be going against what we usually do in any given situation. But the New Normal calls us to a different process of discernment—one that is not simply how we “think” things should be, but as we are called to look at them through the greater narrative and better vision that Jesus gives us. It is not something that we do easily; we have to retrain ourselves in order to begin to process differently than we have in the past.

Luckily, as Joseph was cogitating on his course of action, the angel of the Lord showed up to give some explanation and clarity. Had Joseph not been thoughtful and taken his time with his decision about how to treat Mary, he might have missed the opportunity for the visit from the angel of God. But remember, as stated in the previous verse, Joseph was a righteous man, and therefore was deeply connected to God in his decision-making process. God was willing to help him

out here, with a little advice and clarity coming directly from God, through His messenger.

However, the clarity that came was nothing less than fantastic, by which I mean it was super-normal, or beyond what is normal. While the words gave clarity, it took no less belief than before the angel’s appearance for Joseph to believe. We think that these words would have been a relief for Joseph, but can you imagine getting this kind of message? It would have been no less difficult to believe in the first century than it is to believe today. I think we have a tendency to romanticize the message Joseph received as a simple, “Ah, so that’s what happened” sort of answer to his dilemma. However, I wonder if it wasn’t even more difficult to believe. Of course, an angel showing up is really helpful, but the words the angel said are difficult. The angel said: “For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.” How does this make things easier?

I mean, how does that even work? Is there some sort of simple explanation as to how the Holy Spirit impregnates a woman? Even saying it seems to take it too far. How are we supposed to believe

in something that makes so little sense, and could even, by the most cynical of us, move beyond reality into the silly?

I guess you have to ask yourself whether or not you are willing to suspend disbelief that what we see is what we get in this world.

I used to teach a web-design class and we used a WYSIWYG platform from which to design websites. WYSIWYG

simply stands for “What you see is what you get.” It was much easier to design this way than to understand the coding language HTML. Students made great, if not elementary websites in the class. But do we live our lives in a WYSIWYG way, or do we believe there is more to this story than we can see and even comprehend?

**1— How do you live your life? As if there is more than what you can see, or as if what is tangible is all there is?**

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**2— Do you believe that God is working in realms and realities that are far beyond what we know and understand? If so, what are some of the implications for your life and your decisions?**

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**3 – If we don’t believe in the other realities that God may be working in, what does that mean for your relationship with the story of the gospel?**

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**21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

**T**his directive from the angel is another wrinkle in the story. In the first century, fathers got the prerogative to name their sons, and for sure they would name them with a family name. Often, there would be the prefix “bar” in Hebrew, that means “son of”. But the angel directed Joseph to name this child with a much grander name, and this had to do with fulfilling the prophecy given to us from the book of Isaiah (chapter 7:14, 8:8, and chapter 10). The angel had its eye on both the future and the past in this suggestion, or really, command.

Remember, context is everything, and the angel understood this. Joseph was not to give the child a name that would not recognize Israel's past as well as its future. However, it would become a mark that Joseph had accepted the angel's message, as well as accepted the child as his own. While the gospel of Joseph allows for Mary to name the child, for Matthew and his mostly Hebrew audience, it would have been important for Joseph to name the child. This directive shows God has a hand in all of this. We call this the providence of God. Providence is simply God's intervening in human history and in daily life.

In the previous text, we see that

the angel of the Lord calls Joseph “son of David.” This is to remind Joseph that he comes from a royal lineage, and that the promise of God is that the messiah will come from this line. It is why they end up in Bethlehem, and it is why they, both Mary and Joseph, can come to understand that Jesus is truly the messiah. It is by God's providence these things happen, and specifically, happen to them.

Do you ever feel God's providence working in your life? We often can't see it at the time of occurrence; rather, we see it in hindsight, as things finally come together in ways that we never thought possible. We begin to see that God has had His hand in our lives throughout our experience, and that He is truly invested in the outcome of our choices and our faith. It is humbling to realize that God is at work in our lives everyday, even when it doesn't feel like it. That the God of the universe has some stake in our choices and in our lives should remind us not that the universe revolves around us, but rather, that the universe revolves around God, and we are blessed to have a little bit of His attention. If love is paying attention, then we have the love of the God of everything.



**22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: 23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” 24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.**

**T**he author has decided this would be a good time in which to refer back to previous prophecy about the messiah so as to connect the current narrative with that which was promised to Israel a long time ago. There are about 12 of these quotations in Matthew’s gospel, four or five of them in the narratives of the baby Jesus.

We know that Matthew is quoting from the Septuagint (LXX) because of the use of the word “virgin” as opposed to “young woman,” which was found in earlier Hebrew texts. This is not a problem, as the implication of “young woman” is one that is still a virgin.

But what is more important than the process of conception is the fact that the one conceived will be Emmanuel, or God with us. Why is this important? Because the one who will save them will be one that has the presence of God within them. Interestingly, the text says that “they will call him Emmanuel,” not

that Joseph will call him this name. It is a recognition that Jesus was given to all who would believe, rather than to just one family or one couple. His life was always to be greater than the family he was placed in, and in the same way, we are all brought into his family.

Joseph wakes up from the dream and does what the angel told him to do. He took Mary as his wife, and he was respectful of her until the birth of the baby, which he named Jesus. This must have been a time of an incredible test of the faith of Joseph. It is one thing to make the decision to be faithful, but then to wait through the nine months of pregnancy must have been difficult, to say the least. I have always wondered whether or not Joseph second guessed the angel through this period. Of course, he remained faithful, and we don’t have any indication he struggled with his faith, but I wonder sometimes...

Have you ever started a faith journey with every intention of being faithful,

but questioned your decision along the way? Perhaps this is why we call it a journey, because there are ups and downs, there are detours and redirections. It is pretty human of us to second guess our decisions and to decide to remain faithful to that which God has called us. I don't think we should beat ourselves up

if we sometimes take a circuitous route in our faithfulness to God's call. I wonder if Joseph took the same sort of route through this time. However, regardless of his questions, his second guessing, or even his stalwart faith, the end result was a messiah who he was able to give a name to. That's pretty amazing.

**1— What is it like to know the God of the universe pays attention to you?**

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**2—Have you ever experienced God's providence in your life? Explain how and when.**

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**3 – When you look back at your life, can you see how God has continued to guide and help you? What advice do you have for someone who can't seem to see God's hand at work?**

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**T**his week we studied a story that we all know very well, one that doesn't really hold any surprises for us. However, it also shows us the New Normal. Through the narrative of Joseph, we see that there are ways to respond to the super-normal things that God is doing in the world, and also, there is a way to respond to others that are more God-breathed than we might have imagined. All this is attained by our willingness to let God lead in our lives, and to recognize where His providence is palpable in our experience. We don't often see this in the present, but often in the past and in the way that God has guided our decisions, whispered into our itchy hearts, and spoken into our lives through others.

Why was Joseph willing to follow the directive of the angel? He certainly had a choice, as we have all had choices, and as Adam and Eve had a choice. The reason he was able to follow the guidance of the angel and the Holy Spirit is simple. He had been following his whole life. Verse 19 reminds us that Joseph was a "righteous" man, meaning he was willing to follow God's directives much earlier than when the angel appeared in his dream. Joseph was a follower of God, and therefore, his de-

cision to follow the commands of the angel were not out of line for him. He was used to following the directives of God in his life.

As well, Joseph must have had a worldview that accounted for the "super-normal." While perhaps never experiencing it before in his life, he was able to recognize when God was deciding to do amazing and unnatural things, and he was willing to be a part of it. He wasn't surprised or afraid of the calling God had placed on his life. Because his natural tendency was to follow God, he was able to continue in this vein of living for God and listening to God, as well. Whether it was through the law of Moses, through his community and culture, or through the direct intervention of God through the angel in the dream, Joseph had attained an inclination to follow God.

Perhaps the questions begin with our ability to follow God, even if a directive from an angel is absent in our experience. Is it possible to live into the New Normal of obedience to God, even when what is asked is super-normal to our experience? Is it possible to live the New Normal now, even as Joseph did 2,000 years ago?



## Notes

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## Notes

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# WEEK 2

## MATTHEW 2:1-23 (NLT)

### The Magi Visit the Messiah

**1** After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem **2** and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

**3** When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. **5** "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

**6** "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.

**7** Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." **9** After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

### The Escape to Egypt

**13** When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

**14** So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

**16** When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. **17** Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

**18** "A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more."

#### The Return to Nazareth

**19** After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

**21** So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

**22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, **23** and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

**1 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, 2 “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” 3 King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. 4 He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”**

**T**his has always been one of my favorite parts of the story. There is an exotic flavor when we begin to speak about the Magi, or the magoi, as it would have been rendered in the Greek. This word was to become an umbrella word to refer to a wide range of people who exercised religious or occult powers: soothsayers, dream-interpreters, fortune-tellers, magicians and/or sorcerers. While we don't love the idea that these men were involved in these sorts of practices, it is clear they had at least a passing fancy with astrology, as they saw a new star and decided to follow it. Interestingly, there is another story that is relatively similar to this story that dates from 66 A.D, written by the Roman historian Dio Cassius. In it, there is a similar delegation that arrived in Rome and had come to honor Nero, the Roman ruler at the time.

There are two themes here; 1) that Jesus is destined to kingship over his

own people and all nations, and 2) that Jesus will be rejected by his own nation but acclaimed by Gentiles. These two themes carry us through the whole narrative of Jesus found in Matthew.

Now, this text starts by putting a flag on a relative date. It states that Jesus was born during the “reign of King Herod.” This is especially important to me, because Herod was known as a great builder, and he in fact had built Caesarea, where I was lucky enough to spend many summers growing up. It is not a stretch to say that Herod was a real ruler, who was a vassal ruler of Rome from 37BC to 4BC. He built many great projects including Masada and the Herodian. Both of these were homes for himself and his family, although he spent little time in either one.

Herod was also known to be vicious and a bit nervous about his rule. He was always anxious about his status as king, and therefore, the visit by the Magi would have been received with a bit of

antipathy. Therefore, as we see in the text, because he was deeply disturbed, he brought the leading priests and religious law experts together and asked how this was all about to go down. There was a certain suspicious nature to Herod.

People who are insecure about their status have a tendency to peddle in subterfuge in order to keep their status. It is really a common practice, and no level of status is exempt from this sort of behavior. Whether you are a mob boss, a politician, a street sweeper, a pastor or teacher or what have you, the desire to keep your status is pretty profound. This comes

from a sense of scarcity. Most wars have been fought over a sense of “us not them.” And many people will make poor, immoral, and even irrational decisions based on the idea that there might not be enough so they have to protect their status, their treasure, their influence, their importance. Just like Herod, those who think this way will ultimately reject the coming of the New Normal, the New King, because they will simply have too much to lose.

Herod was afraid that Jesus would take away everything. Do you fear the same thing?

**1— What might you have to give up to recognize Jesus?**

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**2— Is following Jesus worth the loss you will ultimately experience?**

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**3 — Is it possible Jesus will return in abundance what you have lost?**

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**4 He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?” 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:**

**6 ‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,  
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,  
for a ruler will come from you  
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”**

**A**gain, the author brings us to the prophetic word found in his scripture. When he calls together the teachers of religious law and the priests, the word that is used is of sinister origin; in fact, it is used again many times throughout the book of Matthew (26:3; 57:27; 17:62) but it comes from the Septuagint (LXX) in Psalm 2:2, which speaks of rulers who take counsel together against the Lord and His anointed. So we know there is nothing good in this gathering.

The teachers of the religious law knew the scriptures well, and so they chose the text from Micah 5:2 and Samuel 5:2, as well, about where the messiah would come from. It is said in Judea, as there was another Bethlehem in Galilee, where David had come from. So this was said to make sure there was no confusion as to who this new Messiah was. Here, Herod shows that he only has a cursory knowledge of the scriptures of the Hebrews by

having to bring in the priests and the teachers of the law.

There is something interesting, because Matthew adds to the Micah quotation, but including that Bethlehem was “not least among the ruling cities of Judah.” This is not something Micah had included, but it seems Matthew wanted to elevate the status of the city because it was the city that housed the Messiah that Matthew so desperately believed in.

Lastly, there are two designations given to the messiah: 1) ruler, 2) shepherd. There is a difference between a ruler and a shepherd. A ruler gives commands and controls people; a shepherd takes care of his flock. A ruler exerts power; a shepherd exerts compassion. Is it any stretch that Jesus used the parable of the lost sheep to explain what a shepherd is really like to those he has been given stewardship over?

What do you want to be in life? A

shepherd or a ruler? Maybe a little of both? Herod was clearly a ruler, but his desire to maintain his power made him a poor shepherd, as he was more worried about his own power than the caretaking of those God had given him to rule over. We all have been given influence over people in our lives. How do we wield that “power.” Most of us probably don’t see it as power, but it truly can be. We have to always be mindful to be more “shepherdly” than “kingly” in the way we use our influ-

ence and our position. Ultimately, if we are not using those things for the kingdom of God, to show more people the love and grace that Jesus shows us, we are not honoring God in our lives. Of course, there are those that will reject the words of Jesus that come from you, and that is their prerogative, but it is up to us to try and instill a sense of who Jesus is in their lives. We can’t do that when we are worried about our position, our status, and our power.

**1— Who has God given you to shepherd?**

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**2— How can you extend a sense of shepherding to them?**

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**3 – Is there anything that you feel like you “rule” over? How can you move “ruling” to “shepherding”?**

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**7** Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. **8** Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!” **9** After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! **11** They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

In today's text, Herod does what every person who is trying to be disingenuous will eventually do, he isolates different parties in order to control the narrative. What Herod does is call back the wise men for a meeting in private. I have seen this happen over and over again when someone wants to control other people. By separating them, by isolating them, and by being the only one who speaks to the different people involved, you can control the narrative to a point where you can manipulate people.

Herod knew that his regular advisors would smell something fishy if he were to tell the magi, in their presence, that he wanted to worship the child.

Rather, he brought the magi to a private meeting to show his willing collusion with them in order to worship the child. The truth was much darker than this. While the magi had no reason to be concerned about this meeting with Herod, luckily, God warned them in a dream to no longer allow Herod to have any information about the child and about his whereabouts.

The reaction the magi had upon seeing the baby is worth noting. Scripture says “they were filled with joy!” This is how anyone who studied the scriptures and put them as authority in their lives should be able to feel when they meet Jesus. Pure joy should be our response to meeting the Messiah, wheth-

er for the first time or for the last time in our lives. However, when something else is more important than Jesus, then we recognize that being in his presence is uncomfortable, as we know he knows our hearts.

However, when our hearts are filled with joy, the very next thing we do is give to God the most important and valuable things in our lives. This is true for every person who has encountered Jesus and fallen in love with him.

When I first was called into the ministry, I felt I had to give away the thing that mattered most to me, music. I didn't realize there were many ways that God could bless the desire he had

placed in my heart to write music. I figured that my music days were over, and gave it up willingly to follow Christ. However, Jesus is gracious, and gave me more opportunities than I could have even imagined to play music for people. To write songs that mean something more than a simple love song, and to perform in front of audiences. It was a blessing to give what I held most dear over to God, and his blessing changed my life forever.

We see the magi give the most expensive items they had over to Jesus, and of course, he blessed them. Not because of their gifts, but because of their faith.

**1— Have you met Jesus in a way that has filled your heart with joy?**

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**2— What is the most valuable thing you have ever given to Jesus?**

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**3 — Have you ever been around someone who manipulates by isolating and controlling the narrative? How did that make you feel? What can you do about it?**

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**13** After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” **14** That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, **15** and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.” **16** Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him. He sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men’s report of the star’s first appearance. **17** Herod’s brutal action fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

**18** “A cry was heard in Ramah—  
weeping and great mourning.  
Rachel weeps for her children,  
refusing to be comforted,  
for they are dead.”

**T**his is truly the most exciting, yet worst part of the story. We have intrigue, and escape, a prophecy, and worst of all, murder of the innocents. There is a painting by the title “Massacre of the innocents” by Rubens (1611). In it, you see grown men who are fighting through mothers who are fighting to keep their sons from these men who have murder in their eyes. On the floor are the corpses of young boys already killed by these men. It is a tragedy to behold, but is considered one of the great works of art of that pe-

riod. (By the way, it sold in 2002 for 117 million dollars!)

We see a recurring theme pop up again in verses 13-15. Joseph is again approached in a dream by the angel of the Lord and told to leave for Egypt as they are in danger. He tells them not to return until they are given the okay by God himself. Immediately, that night, Joseph and the family leave for Egypt. Again, this was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy that we find in the book of Numbers 23:22. God’s providence and care for his son is again shown to us. As

well, God is able to move through history in order to have his plans become reality.

Of course, Herod was not happy about this at all. Rather than take a reasoned and thoughtful approach, Herod allowed his anger and anxiety to get the best of him and simply had all the boys around Bethlehem killed if they were two years or younger. Can you imagine the outcry to this behavior? Perhaps that is why another prophecy is referenced (Samuel 10:2). The cry that is heard assumes that Rachel is lamenting the tragic death of these children, and it is heard as far away as Ramah.

This is obviously a literary tool, but the meaning is clear: God is in no way happy about the death of the innocents.

Of course, neither should we be okay with the death of those at the hand of those who seek power, seek to oppress, and seek to keep their status, no matter what the cost. If we are followers of Christ, we realize that the status given to us by the world around us matters nothing compared to the status as citizens of heaven. There is no position and no possession that can compare with the rewards promised to us as faithful followers of Christ. To amass what the world has to offer, while giving a sense of contentment and even safety, is not ordained nor required by God to be faithful. Rather, to lose is to gain in the kingdom of God. That is the new normal. The only status we require is granted to us by the grace of God.

**1— What have you acquired that you would have a hard time letting go?**

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**2— How can you maintain a sense of worth when you know that the only status you need comes from God?**

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**3 — Have you ever had a dream when you feel that God was speaking to you? What did he say to you? And did you follow the requests?**

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**19 When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. 20 “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother back to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”**

**W**e continue the narrative and realize that there were a few years between the last verse and this verse. This is one of the things we realize about the life of Jesus. There are huge portions that we simply don't know anything about. There are differing accounts, found in the apocrypha, of what Jesus might have been up to, but none of them made it into the canon, so we don't take those musings to be authoritative like the other books we have in scripture.

What do we do with the times we don't have recorded for the life of Jesus? We can conjecture and we can guess, but the truth is, we simply don't know. I remember watching some documentary with my father that conjectured Jesus had taken some very long trips between his time at the temple when he was 12 and the start of his ministry. They claimed he might have gone so far as to be in India, or even China. I remember being fascinated by the idea. I guess the reason they proposed such journeys was because of the relatively untouched early Christian communities in some of those places. While I don't think that narrative was true, it was interesting to

think about. It also reminded me that the Gospel went East, as well as West. We have a tendency to forget that.

The major theme of this text is the continued care that God shows to this family. God continues to be consistent in people's lives, and what He begins in your life He will continue if you let him. The infancy narrative of Jesus is a stellar example of how following the directives of God in our lives is probably the best thing we can do. Joseph, a righteous man, was willing to listen to the will of God in his life, and in the life of his family. Because of this, he was able to keep his family safe, he was able to continue the work of God, even at his own inconvenience. Sometimes, what God asks of us is not necessarily convenient, but it is in our best interests.

There is some parallel in this story to the story of Moses, being called away from Egypt and ultimately back into Egypt, as those who were wishing Moses harm were no longer living. Biblical authors will often harken back to their foundational stories in order to remind the reader that God has been working for a long time for the salvation of humankind.

**1— Have you ever been called somewhere by God and you just got up and went? Write down the whole narrative as a testament to faith in God's prompting.**

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**2— Are there situations you need to get away from in your life happening now, any that God is calling you away from?**

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**3 – Have you ever been called back to a place you thought you were getting away from? How did it make you feel to go back?**

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**21 So Joseph got up and returned to the land of Israel with Jesus and his mother. 22 But when he learned that the new ruler of Judea was Herod's son Archelaus, he was afraid to go there. Then, after being warned in a dream, he left for the region of Galilee. 23 So the family went and lived in a town called Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said: "He will be called a Nazarene."**

**S**o, we see that politics are still playing a role in the life of Jesus. When Herod died, he had three sons who were fighting for control. The three sons were Herod Antipas, Philip, and Archelaus. Judea came under the rule of Archelaus, who had apparently inherited his father's violent tendencies, for he was reputed to have murdered 3,000 people at the beginning of his reign. Joseph made the right decision to end up in Nazareth.

The modern town of Nazareth has always been a bit of an enigma to me. It has this amazing Catholic Church there that is in honor of Mary. It is called the Church of the Annunciation. In it, there are mosaics of Mary and the baby Jesus donated from countries all over the world. However, the town of Nazareth itself has always been a bit of a grungy and dirty town. The church stands in stark contrast to the rest of the town. I have often wondered what the town of Nazareth looked like in the time that Jesus moved there.

One thing that is interesting is the

notion that Joseph and Jesus would have worked in a town that was being built a few miles away named Sepphoris. Therefore, each day they would have had to walk together in order to get to work and back each day. It has been posited that this is perhaps where many of the agricultural parables of Jesus come from, as they would have had to transverse local fields in the walk to be day laborers in Sepphoris each day. If this is true, it would make sense that a carpenter or a construction worker would only have agricultural parables to share, rather than parables of builders.

God, again, uses the hand of providence in order to have Jesus become a Nazarene, in order to fulfill the prophecy we find in scripture. The New Normal is living a life that recognizes that when we know what we have learned, we learn what we know. By looking backward we are able to see what God has for us in the future. By following the narrative of the past and God's faithfulness, we are able to chart our way in

the future. The one constant that is true in both the past and the future is that God has always been faithful to see His plans come to fruition. As well, He has constantly been working toward our salvation.

**1— When have you doubted that God would remain faithful to you? Write down this story.**

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**2—What can you do to allow the past to inform your future trajectory?**

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**3 – What is the best thing you can say about how God has been faithful in your life?**

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If there is one constant we can learn from the history of God in the world, or what we like to call “salvation history,” is that God is continuing His work, from creation until today. We are never without a God who is willing to work with us to find our way to a relationship with Him, and to a better understanding of how salvation works in our lives. God is constantly with us, constantly looking out for us, and always seeking what is best for us. Our job is to listen, to react, and to do so with most haste.

The story of the infant Jesus is always a story of intrigue, of politics, of escape, as well as a story of faithfulness. The faithfulness comes from God and it comes from Joseph as well. Both are partnering in their attempts to keep Jesus safe from the politics of the day, from harm, with an eye on the fulfillment of prophecy from the Old Testament. This story is one that seeks to remind us all that to follow God is for sure the best choice that we can make. And while our experience with God may not come in the form of dreams telling us to get to a different country for our own safety, it very well could be a change in life that we hadn't expected, a change in careers we weren't looking for, or simply a change in atti-

tude about something you might have been sure about before you started listening to God.

God's continued faithfulness is a source of comfort for us, at least it should be. Again, sometimes it is not immediately understood, but when we connect with the larger narrative God is creating, we begin to have a new patience that can change the way we view the world. Without connection to this narrative, we are playing in a world we don't truly understand. God is a thematic God, who takes a long view of how things may work out. While today we may feel that things are out of control, God has a long view of history and even what is coming next. When things feel out of control, as they must have for Joseph during those turbulent times, we can turn to Jesus. It may sound cliché, it may be a trope you have heard so many times that it is hard to believe. But we have to have faith in the goodness and longevity of God and His incredible care for us.

Perhaps if we take the same tack that Joseph took, to simply trust in God, then things will get better, our lives will have more peace, and even in the midst of some craziness, we can still see God moving.



## Notes

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# Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

# WEEK 3

## MATTHEW 3:1-17 (NLT)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

**1** In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea **2** and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” **3** This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”

**4** John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. **5** People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. **6** Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. **7** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? **8** Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. **9** And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. **10** The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. **11** “I baptize you with[b] water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

The Baptism of Jesus

**13** Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. **14** But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. **16** As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. **17** And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

**3 In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, 2 “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”**

It is hard to overestimate the impact that John the Baptist had on the ministry of Jesus, and Matthew follows Mark’s estimate of his significance. John was undoubtedly part of the separatist movement that thrived in Palestine and Syria, especially in and around the Jordan Valley in the centuries before and even after the time of Jesus. The most famous of these communities is the Essene Community at Qumran, which left behind what has come to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of the earliest manuscripts of the Old Testament that have ever been found.

These communities had a tendency to have their own rites and rituals, often around some practice of washing in the water. As well, they were often apocalyptic communities, with their adherents preaching the “end of the world.” While there has been no certain connection between John and one of these communities, the notion that John went to the “Judean wilderness” makes us think that perhaps he was from one of these separatist groups.

Of course, for Matthew, John the Baptist is much more than an aberration from one of these movements. Rather, he was the second coming of

Elijah, the one who came to “make straight” the way of the Lord. He was the precursor to the Messiah, the hoped for one of Israel. It is possible that for Matthew, he was Elijah, returning to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. (Mal. 3:1-2; Mal. 4:5-6).

But for us, John the Baptist has always been a bit of an enigma. He comes out of the wilderness—although still preaching in the wilderness, dressed like a madman, eating strange food, and super concerned with people repenting of their sins because “the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” What is crazy is that people took him up on his offer to baptize them, and they came from miles around to the Jordan River in order to confess and to be baptized into a messiah that even John had not yet met.

Matthew uses that term “wilderness” to remind us of Israel’s time in the desert, and this is perhaps where we can bring it home today. When have you spent time in the wilderness? I am not speaking of that time when you went camping with your friends or family. I mean that time when you felt like you were spiritually lost, and you couldn’t find a spiritual home. When you felt as

if you were all alone, wandering, never knowing where you were supposed to be going. Have you ever felt that way? We all go through it, but we have a tendency to try to find our way home by ourselves rather than searching for the help of someone like a John the Baptist in our lives, one who can help bring us

to Christ.

Remember, our spiritual journeys are not to be attempted alone. Rather, we are called to be constantly looking for a community in which we can grow, find wisdom, and seek someone who can lead us to a great understanding of Christ.

**1— Do you feel like you need a John the Baptist in your life?**

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**2— Have you ever done a deeper study on John the Baptist?**

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**3 — Why do you think God placed him into the narrative of Jesus?**

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**7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? 8 Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. 9 Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. 10 Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.**

**J**ohn was even an enigma to the ruling class of religious leaders in his day. They would come to watch him baptize. However, he would not let them off the hook when they showed up to see what he was really doing. The above paragraph is a good example of how John went about preaching. And everyone loves a provocative preacher. That is, as long as the vitriol of the preacher is not visited on them. I can imagine the crowds listening to the accusations that John hurled at the Pharisees and Sadducees with great relish.

John’s harsh words were targeting the ruling religious classes, but it was also for the common man. In the Jewish communities of the time, there was a sense of superiority due to the fact they had come from a chosen people. Those who could trace their family tree back to the prophets were even more

“chosen.” However, just being part of the community, a birthright by the way, was a marker of the favor God had shown you. Their monotheism, which was primarily tribal, was what put them apart and above the nations and peoples of the area. John is striking at the heart of this kind of thinking.

When John says “God can create children of Abraham from these very stones...” he is throwing out a scathing indictment that struck at the very heart of why they thought they were special. Tying their faith tradition to the patriarch Abraham was a source of pride for them, and again, reminded them of their special place as they were chosen by God, through Abraham. Of course, we see this again in the writings of Paul in the book of Romans, as he makes the connection between Abraham’s faith and the faith of those who believe in Jesus.

But John doesn't pull any punches. He is more than willing to let them know that it is not about the kind of tree they are, but it is about the root that produces the fruit of the tree. And if there is no fruit, John's warning to them is that they might be severed, chopped down, and discarded in the fire. This is not something anyone is interested in hearing. It must not only be shocking

to hear, but paramount to treason in some respects. He was willing to be the one to call out hypocrisy, deceitfulness, and to push back on the religious status quo of the day. This was no small task in the first century, as the political and religious establishments were so intertwined it was hard to decipher the difference between the two.

**1— Is there a preacher that you particularly like? Why do you like them? Are they provocative? Do they call out the establishment for their hypocrisy?**

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**2— Does that preaching ever hit a little too close to home?**

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**3 – Why do you think people would travel far and wide to see John preach?**

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**13 Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to talk him out of it. “I am the one who needs to be baptized by you,” he said, “so why are you coming to me?”**

**A**mong the many who came from the cities to the Jordan River to be baptized by John was Jesus of Nazareth. While every gospel records this event, Matthew is particular in its account. From this account, we discover that the baptism that Jesus received was somewhat different in meaning from the countless others that John was doing during that time. While for others it was connected with the confession and repentance of sin, in anticipation of the coming messiah, for Jesus it was a rite of entry into his messianic calling. It was the initiation he needed in order to be fulfilled in order to begin to do the work for which he came to this earth from heaven.

Matthew, unlike Mark's narrative, adds a conversation that takes place between Jesus and John just before the baptism. Through this conversation, and John's seeming objection to baptizing Jesus, Matthew poses a question that might have troubled you at some point, and probably troubled those in the early church; "why was Jesus baptized by John?" This conversation is answered in v. 15, but today we see that John poses the question.

You see, when you finally recognize who Jesus really is in your life, you have the same refrain that we see in the book of John. John 1:27 states "Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal." When you know who Jesus is, you stand in awe of his majesty and glory, and you immediately recognize that you are unworthy to do even the slightest thing for him. We see this in almost every encounter that Jesus has with someone who recognizes who he really is. To know Jesus is to know the God of the universe, for as it says in Colossians 1:19, "For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ."

Have you ever been speaking to someone and then realized they had some sort of fame? Years ago, I was at a convention and chatting with a guy who seemed really nice. We spoke for like five minutes, and he didn't seem like he had anywhere to go. He was attentive to the conversation and was thoughtful and kind. When he walked away a friend said to me, "Do you know who that was?" I didn't, I said. He told me that it was Michael W. Smith, who

at the time was one of the biggest Christian music artists. While I knew who he was, it hadn't registered with me that was who I was speaking to. We went into the big meeting hall at the convention and sure enough, he was the main artist of the day. I was embarrassed but also deeply impressed with his sense of care that I felt through our conversation.

For many, coming into contact with

the most high God through Jesus is like this.

They can't believe they were talking to the one to whom God had poured out His fullness. When we recognize this, we begin to view ourselves very differently. John recognized who Jesus was, and he deemed himself unworthy to baptize Jesus. Tomorrow we take on the question of why it needed to be done.

**1— Have you ever spoken to someone, not knowing who they were, only to find out later how important they really are?**

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**2— What does it feel like to be in contact with the God of the Universe? Does it put you in your place a little?**

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**3 — How can we recognize when we are in the presence of God, and how should we respond?**

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## 15 But Jesus said, “It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires.” So John agreed to baptize him.

**J**esus gives an interesting answer here. It seems as if he agrees with John’s assessment of their place in the world; however, he still wants John to do it in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” This idea of fulfilling righteousness is important in Matthew’s gospel. Two things are at play here. 1) “Fulfill” is a word used when referring to the OT prophecies. And 2) “Righteousness” is a key term in Matthew’s vocabulary. So to fulfill all righteousness means that this must be done in order to fulfill what has been prophesied in scripture about the coming of the messiah.

As well, it seems that Jesus knows this is a rite of passage that needs to happen before he begins his ministry in earnest. Why? Why would a ritual like this need to take place in order for Jesus to actually do his ministry? There are three answers that come from one of the commentaries.

(1) Baptism is a practice which God ordains or commands; hence, the baptism of Jesus will fulfill God’s righteous requirements.

(2) Baptism is the first step in Jesus’ identification with sinners, by which they in turn will become righteous through Him (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21).

(3) Baptism is the way Jesus assumes his role in God’s plan, which has righteousness as its goal in the community which Jesus gathers (cf. Matt. 5:6, 17–20; 6:33). By baptizing Jesus, John will enable the way of righteousness which his own work initiated (21:32) to move toward fulfillment in the work of his successor.

While each of these interpretations has some validity, Matthew was probably thinking along the lines of the third option. There was, in some respects, a passing of the torch in ministry. We see this more clearly in the discussion that John has with his disciples in the book of John, written much later in the first century. The discussion goes like this. Please excuse the long quote, but it tells the whole story:

*John 3:22 Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.*

*23 At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. 24 (This was before John was thrown into prison.) 25 A debate broke out between John’s disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleans-*

ing. 26 So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

27 John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. 28 You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' 29 It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. 30 He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

31 "He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things,

but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. 32 He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! 33 Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. 34 For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves His Son and has put everything into his hands. 36 And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

John understood his place in the universe. So when he baptized Jesus in our original pericope, we understand that he was humbled by the role that he played in the life of Jesus, and he had no delusions of grandeur.

**1— What role do you play in the salvation history of the world?**

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**2— How do you expand the kingdom of God?**

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**3 — How can you recognize when you must decrease and he must increase?**

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**16 After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him.**

**T**his is one of the great passages in scripture, so let's break it up between two days. Verses 16 and 17 are often taken together, as they finish a thought, but we will linger here for a moment. While Matthew does not say anything about the baptism itself, we find ourselves at the tail end, with Jesus coming out of the water.

By the way, this is one of the reasons why a belief in baptism by immersion makes sense. Jesus came out of the water, rather than have water splashed on him. It may seem like a simple and obvious statement, but there have been many theological discussions and varying understandings of how to baptize, and not every church goes about it in the same fashion. The SDA church has always followed the tradition of baptism by immersion, so we put you all the way under the water. We do this in order to take the practice that Jesus was involved in as our own. As well, the metaphor of immersion is connected to the idea of death and resurrection. With this text and the metaphor firmly in place, baptism in a pool and by immersion makes the most sense, both practically and theologically.

But what we are really dealing with here is the Theophany which follows

the baptism. What is a theophany? It is a physical manifestation of God to humanity. While Jesus is the most profound theophany there ever was or ever will be, in this text, Jesus in his humanity experienced the theophany of the heavens opening up and a dove descending upon him. By the way, this is one of the few times in scripture we see the trinity assembled together. The father, who speaks, the Holy Spirit who descends as a dove, and Jesus, the human/god who receives their affirmation. It must have been amazing to see this! Those few followers of John who got a chance to see the messiah both close up and being affirmed by the God of the heavens.

Have you ever had a theophany? Have you ever had a manifestation of God in your life that was undeniable? One of my favorite authors, David Dark, wrote a book called "Everyday Apocalypse" which argues, in broad terms, that we have these theophanies every day if we are open to seeing how God is working through culture, through community and through our relationships. While the theophany in these texts is much more palpable and tangible, we do have the opportunity to see God in so many ways each and every day.



## 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy.”

**W**hat son wouldn't want to hear these words from his father? And in the New Testament, or the second testament as some call it, we don't hear the voice of God all that often. In fact, about the only time God does speak is to say these words, and then to add to this phrase in Matthew 17:5, “listen to him...”

While most of us have heard these quotes in the following manner; “this is my son, in whom I am well pleased.” The NLT renders it a bit differently and with a more common tongue. The phrase, “...who brings me great joy” is a really great translation. It conveys the sense of pride and yet contentment that God has with His son, Jesus. Before the ministry of Jesus has begun in earnest, God is already proud and privileged by His son. This shows a grace that God extends even to His son by simply loving him regardless of his action or inaction. Jesus was about to change the world, but before he was able to do this, God deemed it important that Jesus know how much God really loves him and is proud of him.

This is great parenting, and we should take note. The idea that our children have our love regardless of success or failure, helps our children to under-

stand not only what the love of God is, but how they should be loved by others as well. I can remember my parents coming to every basketball game they could over my high school basketball career. I never thought their love was contingent on me winning. They came to support my interest and talent, and they were always supportive of me developing in whatever I put my time and energy to.

But this baptism and this affirmation of the identity and calling of Jesus is important for us to note. Throughout the ministry of Jesus we will see this calling and identity affirmed again and again, whether through the demons at Gadara (8:28-34) or by the voice of God again at the transfiguration (17:1-8), or the disciples (14:28-33) or even by the Roman Centurion (27:51-54). Throughout the ministry of Jesus, as people came into contact with him, they were reminded of his special status, of his incredible power, and of his calling to save the world from sin and death.

It is with this in mind we look at this text and are grateful for a God who loved us so much He gave His only son for us. And in doing this, He did not condemn the world, but He saved the world. In times when things on the

planet are strange, are scary, and are even downright ugly, we can recognize not only the need for a God who loves, but the presence of just such a God in Jesus and through the Holy Spirit. May

you be encouraged today that there is a God who loves you, is proud of you, and has accepted you as a son and daughter of His own!

**1 — Did you feel accepted by your parents? Why or why not?**

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**2 — How are you showing your kids how much you love them?**

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**3 — Do you think that God is proud of you? Why?**

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**3 — Is it hard to remember that Jesus came to save us and not condemn us?**

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In this week's texts we are confronted by a God who is willing to show us what the New Normal is and how we usher that worldview into our lives. Baptism is a vital part of our faith journey, and it declares that we owe our allegiance not to a nation or a country or an ideology, but to a God who ultimately loves us, has adopted us, and is proud of us. We see a son who is willing to go through the steps needed to "fulfill all righteousness" and a God who is willing to affirm and acknowledge His son's identity and calling.

While these texts are not long, they are full of theological truths and theophanies about who God is, how He loves, and the importance of Jesus. It also gives us an example of how we can begin to declare and live in the New Normal, that new normal that isn't really all that new to us who call ourselves followers of Christ. We are not simply those who espouse some sort of ideology; rather, we are followers of the living and breathing Jesus, who died, was resurrected, and now advocates for us with the Father.

The message of the gospel is one that flies in the face of everything else on the planet. There is grace for the undeserving, there is compassion for the oppressed, and there is healing for

the sick. The good news for the poor is found in God's people working diligently to ease their pain and suffering, and there is a sacrificial leaning to the lives of those who follow Christ. Without this, we are missing a major portion of the idea of the Gospel that was given to us by Jesus.

Baptism is an outward expression of an inner decision to follow Christ where he leads, as well as it is a connection to the beginning of the ministry Jesus began 2,000 years ago. Since then, followers have been declaring their desire to be closer to God, through Jesus, and they have been experiencing theophanies of their own. Perhaps these epiphanies and theophanies are not as dramatic as what we saw at the baptism of Jesus, but they are still palpable and remind us that God is still active, still working, and still present in our lives. These words, rituals, and rites continue to remind of the constancy of God in the world throughout history and throughout our lives as well.



## Notes

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## Notes

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# WEEK 4

## JAMES 5:13-18 (NLT)

Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

**1** Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

**2** After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

**4** Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall 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 and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **6** “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

**7** Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

**8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **9** “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

**10** Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

**11** Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him..

**4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. 2 For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.**

**V**erse 2 of this story is perhaps the most obvious statement in all of scripture. But let's not get there too quickly.

We all know this story of the temptation of Jesus. But how does this story begin to lead us into the idea of the New Normal? How can this story, that we have heard so many times, be re-envisioned to bring us to a better realization that living for God changes everything and creates in us a new vision of life and people and God? Is living a life for God so different than simply living a life on this planet? I mean, we know that the hope of heaven is something great, but what difference, if any, does it make for us now? If we call ourselves followers of Christ, is there a reality that we live that is in any way different from those who don't follow Christ?

Let's just take the first phrase of this text as a measure of what it means to live in the New Normal. "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit..." There are a few things we should take note of in this phrase. First, Jesus was led. It means there was something that Jesus was allowing to guide him. Now, we know that he is the God of the universe, so why is it that we find him being "led" anywhere? Doesn't

power mean you don't have to submit yourself to anyone else? In this New Normal, power is found in a willingness to submit yourself to the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not feel as if he was above this in his life. Perhaps we shouldn't feel as if this is something we will ever get away from. Submission to the will of God does not make us less "powerful" but more connected to the power of God.

By looking into the life of Jesus, we begin to see that what we thought we knew about power, about wisdom, about strength, and about success has been turned on its head. This last year has taught us that things might not ever go back to "normal" and that we might be living lives very differently than we have in the past. I am more so reminded that Jesus ushered in a New Normal millennia ago by simply being willing to show us a new way to be human, a new way to live, and a New Normal that defies everything that has come before and has come after. Followers of Christ were always meant to be a little different than the rest of the world. We were always meant to be a little "off" because we see the world through different eyes and we interact with different hearts.

When followers of Christ are indiscernible from the rest of the world, we might not be living the lives that resonate with the life of Jesus. We need to think about the implications of this.

Oh, and verse 2, the statement about being hungry, wouldn't you be if you fasted for 40 days? I sure would be!

**1 — When was the last time you were “led” anywhere by the Holy Spirit? Be specific.**

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**2 — What was the outcome of following the promptings of the Holy Spirit?**

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**3 — How can you make sure you are living a life, like that of Christ, that is trying?**

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**3 During that time the devil came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.”<sup>4</sup> But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**

**S**o we begin this week with the sequel to the story of Jesus’ baptism. The account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness is a parallel with the story of the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea (Duet. 8:2). In the same way the Israelites were tested at Sinai, Jesus was tested after he comes out of the water of baptism. He is weakened by hunger, and the issue we have at stake is an issue of loyalty. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus is “tested as Israel was, yet without sin.” Of course, that outcome was in no way guaranteed, for this was a real test, a test in which he could have turned away from God and God’s will. This reality makes this particular narrative incredibly important to our understanding of how Jesus went about his life and ministry.

The story of the conversation with Jesus and Satan is shared in Luke as well, with many parallels, to be sure. We will stay with the Matthew account, as this is the book we are studying in this New Normal series.

The devil comes to Jesus and makes an assumption, one that is pretty profound; “If you are the son of God...” It is not

so much a question as an acknowledgement of the identity affirmed through the theophany experienced in the baptism of Jesus. Even the devil knows the power of the position that Jesus holds in the trinity. We should have no less faith in the assumption that Jesus holds a firm position in the God-community we call the trinity. While the trinity is often a difficult concept to understand, we can, at least in brief, take it to mean that Jesus and God are so alike as to be one, and in this way they are in the divine dance of the trinity, fulfilled by the Holy Spirit.

The proposition posed by the devil speaks to the immediacy of the physical needs of Jesus; after all, he was hungry! However, at another level, it poses the question of how Jesus will wield his messianic power throughout his life and ministry. Will he use his power for his own ends, becoming a wonder-worker, or will he withhold his power to use for the edification of God and others? This is a real question and a real temptation, simply because all that power was at his fingertips. While this proposition would not be a temptation to you or me, as we cannot do this sort of wonder work, Jesus had

the power of heaven and earth and the universe within his reach. However, he saw the larger narrative, the bigger picture at play.

When we are tempted, do we see beyond the immediate needs, or do we succumb to that which is most pressing in our lives? Had Jesus given himself over to the physical needs, it would have

meant the end of the kingdom of God on earth. However, he knew that there were greater themes and narratives at play that needed to be recognized and seen to the end. We are so lucky that Jesus believes more in loyalty to God's will than in comfort and ease for himself. Do we feel the same things?

**1— What is tempting to you?**

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**2— How do you make sure you are not succumbing to that which the devil puts in front of you?**

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**3 — How can you continually look to the greater narrative that God is building in your life?**

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**5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, 6 and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, ‘He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”**

**T**he second proposition takes Jesus from the wilderness to the highest point of the temple, which is sometimes thought to be the outer courtyard parapet. Here, the devil decides he would try to use scripture against Jesus by quoting from Psalm 91:11-12. This is ingenious, and has caught many a follower of Jesus Christ off guard by simply not knowing scripture better than one who has nefarious intentions. Scripture can be used in inappropriate ways in order to manipulate, in order to coerce, and even to justify the worst parts of humanity.

Why is it that we have a book that can be interpreted in so many ways? Wouldn't it have been easier to have made the scriptures more clear, so they could not be used in any way to manipulate or coerce? Of course, that would be much easier, but Jesus will tomorrow give us a model of how we fight back when scripture is being manipulated for someone's personal ends.

Today, we need to understand that the devil was testing the confidence that Jesus had in God to protect him, while at the same time, appealing to

his selfishness to show his own power to the world and to the devil himself. Was Jesus interested in a display of power, was he bothered that the devil was using scripture in such a way as to dare Jesus to force God into a miracle, or was the devil simply misunderstanding the very nature of who Jesus was? Regardless of any of these questions, we are left looking out over Jerusalem, on that parapet with Jesus, wondering if he will fall prey to the temptation of the devil.

You see, when the devil decided to use scripture, he was deciding to step into a realm that Jesus knew all too well. The devil dared to try and use these words from God, given through the prophets and the Psalmist, for his own ends. The devil seemed to feel—and probably still does—that the quickest way to tempt a follower of Jesus, someone who takes the scriptures seriously, is to simply distort that which we hold dear. The problem comes when we forget that the devil knows scripture as well as we do, perhaps even better. He has been studying it in order to use it against us.

In the movie, “The Other Guys” with Will Ferrel and Mark Wahlberg, there is a scene where Mark’s character begins to ballet dance. When asked how he got so good at it he basically answers that he learned to dance, ironically, to make fun of a kid who was taking ballet. While I’m not sure I rec-

ommend the movie, the scene always caught me as interesting. Sometimes, to refute something, we have a tendency to learn it better than those who actually believe in it.

If the devil knows the scriptures so well, how well should we know them?

**1— What can you do to increase your knowledge of scripture?**

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**2— Do these study guides lead you to a deeper understanding of scripture? Remember, they are simply a jumping-off point. They are not exhaustive.**

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**3 – Do you know how the scriptures came to be? What decisions were made to find the canon the way we do today? Would knowing the development process help us with understanding them? Do a little research here to bolster your understanding of how scripture was decided upon all those years ago.**

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## 7 Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’”

**J**esus fights fire with fire. He quotes from Duet. 6:16. While the devil had quoted Psalm 91:11-12, Jesus shows himself to be a much more faithful interpreter of biblical texts. Jesus also understood the nature of the “temptation.” While we often think of being “tempted” by things that are attractive or appealing to us, the truth is, what is unfolding in these texts is a “test.”

Have you ever uttered the phrase, “the devil made me do it?” It is a way to misdirect responsibility for things that we do that are wrong or unrighteous. We often use the phrase as a tongue-in-cheek way to shrug off something that we find ourselves doing that we know we shouldn’t.

But here, the temptation or test of Jesus really went to the core of who he was and what he was given to do. What was tested was his willingness to trust God’s larger plan, to trust in God’s deeper purpose for his life, and to commit wholly to the will of God in his life. This is especially hard when we think we are in control, or should be in control. If you have ever heard the phrase “he/she sold their soul to the devil,” it is a reference to this story in some respects. Jesus was

being asked to take into his own hands the will of God, and by forcing God’s hand into a miracle, he would have traded the will and purpose of God in for the power and glory that is fleeting in this world.

When we force God into a miracle to save us or help us, perhaps we are not showing faith, but rather unfaith. What do I mean? I have seen many a person who will pray over the sick rather than seek treatment. I have seen many who have prayed for a miracle to get them out of a situation, rather than have them do the work of unraveling what they put together. Many times, I have seen people who would rather God show up miraculously and supernaturally in order to fix something they created, than actually do what has been laid out before them in Scripture to keep them out of these situations. Remember a few months ago in the book of James (5:12) when he asks us not to take oaths but to let our yes be yes and our no’s be no’s? (This comes up in the next chapter of Matthew as well, by the way.) Perhaps trusting in God and not the machinations of our own minds and hearts would have kept us out of these situations.

Why test God? When we test, we don't have faith; rather, we put our loyalty to his will in our lives on thin ice. Today, seek to trust in the will of God

for your life, rather than leaning into the ways the devil would have us force God's hand.

**1— Have you ever been tempted or tested to force God into something? What was that like?**

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**2— How can we continue to study scripture so that we are prepared when the testing comes?**

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**3 – What are your favorite scriptures that help you remember to trust in the will of God?**

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**8 Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 “I will give it all to you,” he said, “if you will kneel down and worship me.”**

It seems that the devil likes to take Jesus to top high points to test his allegiance to God. High points, specifically mountains, a setting for several of the stories in Matthew, all deal with power and authority. (Matthew 4:8; 4:1; 15:29; 17:1; 28:16) This reminds us of the story of Moses ascending to Mount Nebo so God can show him all the land that Israel will eventually possess. (Deuteronomy 34:1-4)

So, we might ask a question here about how it is that the devil can take Jesus anywhere and offer him the power to rule the world. To really appreciate the offer, we need to remember that in the NT it speaks of the devil as the present world ruler. It seems that he might be in a strategic position to give dominion to Jesus, at least the dominion that a lesser or conventional Messiah might seek. However, Jesus has no interest in what the devil is offering. I suppose if you had dominion over the universe, dominion of a speck of dust might not be that enticing to you.

Of course, as we read this story, we already know the ending, but in the time of the temptation/test, it would have been a real choice. That is the key

to temptation, it has to be something that is really and truly a choice to be made. Again, there is a short-sightedness to the nature of the temptation, and Jesus always has one eye on the greater narrative that God is unfolding each and every moment. The devil always seems to forget that.

He assumes that you will forget it, too. You see, that is one of the pillars of the devils' attempts to trip us all up. He wants us to forget there is a greater narrative at play in the world. When we succumb to the temporal story that we are all living, forgetting there is a timeless and universal story being told that is so much greater than each of us, we become cannon fodder for the devil.

I've been reflecting on this a great deal in 2020. This has been a tough year, but it is a relatively short amount of time in the earth's history, and certainly in the story of God it is not even a second of the clock. So why do we become so fearful and so anxious in the midst of this? Perhaps it is because we forget the greater and more universal narrative that God is creating. I don't know how 2020, with all its disasters, upheaval, pandemics and social

unrest, fits into the greater picture God is creating, but I do believe it has a role to play. Am I happy to be living through it? No! But do I still trust that

God is good and he is compassionate and loves us all? Yes, I do believe that with all my heart.

**1— What do you think 2020 is teaching you about God's greater narrative?**

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**2— When you feel tempted, is it because you want something more immediate and forget about the long story?**

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**3 – What do you think about the NT thinking of the devil as the ruler of the world? How does that make you feel?**

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**10 “Get out of here, Satan,” Jesus told him. “For the Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”**

**11 Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.**

**H**ere, Jesus demands that the devil depart, much the same way that he did with Peter when Peter was trying to divert Jesus from the way of the cross. (4:10; 16:21-23) Jesus was no longer playing this game, and so his demand that Satan leave him alone was a demand which Satan could not ignore. When Satan leaves, all that was left was for the angels to come and take care of Jesus. This reminds us of Elijah when the angels took care of him before he undertook the journey to Mount Horeb. (1 Kings 19:1-8).

There are a ton of temptation stories in the Old Testament, and this story links Jesus to this larger biblical context. It lets the reader know that Jesus had to also prove his faithfulness in the midst of testing. The difference is that there was a cosmic conflict on display through this story rather than simply a test of loyalty. Remember, the fate of the universe depended on how things would go through these temptations. Never before, and never again will there be so much at stake for all of us. Thank God that Jesus was able to remember the greater

narrative that he was living.

When you begin to live into this greater story, the story of God, a few things happen: **1)** you begin to see others as part of a bigger story, rather than just part of your story. **2)** you want to begin to help other people understand why we can live differently. Our understanding of this greater narrative should, at least, let us take current events, take perceived slights and uncomfortable situations with a grain of salt, as opposed to letting it derail us from what is the greater story God is telling though and with us. Without this understanding, it is easy to be blown back and forth by the wind, going this way and that and forgetting that the anchor point to our lives is not what is happening on any given day, but what has happened through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the world and beyond.

Jesus was able to overcome the devil by looking beyond his hunger, beyond his hurting body, and into the greater world that God is creating. It is a hard thing today to live into the “not yet,” but at the same time be fully present believers today. Oh, that Jesus

would come! But until he does, let's world that we know God is building in  
make sure we are helping to create the heaven at the same time.

**1 — Was there a time when you overcame temptation?**

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**2 — What allowed you to be able to do that?**

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**3 — How can you approach temptation in your life so that you can be assured of the continued victory of Jesus in your life?**

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**T**his week we have looked into the New Normal that Jesus developed as he dealt with the temptation that the devil put forth to him after he had spent 40 days in the desert waiting on the Lord and fasting. In his diminished physical state, the devil thought it appropriate to come and throw some temptations in the way of Jesus before he could even begin his ministry. This is a pattern that we see from the OT and those who would follow God. Temptation will always be a traveling companion for those who will have some impact for the kingdom of God. Satan only bothers with those who are a threat to his perceived dominion in the world.

As we look at the texts, are we willing to recognize the deep knowledge of scripture that both the devil and Jesus had? Of course, Jesus has a better exegesis of the text, but it should be worth noting that the devil was more than willing to use scripture against even God himself. What is fascinating is that Jesus was unfazed and unrelenting in his willingness to be loyal to God. Regardless of what he was being offered, he didn't think that it was worth giving up the kingdom of God that he had been sent to establish. Because of this, the tools the devil had in his pockets

were not enough to entice or in any way attract Jesus to his offers.

What is the devil offering you? What do you think would be worth you succumbing to his offer? For you, does the kingdom of God hold a place so dear to your heart that you would be willing to let everything else go in order to continue your journey with and toward it? For Jesus, there was nothing more beautiful, nothing worth more, nothing that came close to comparing to the great glory of God as seen through the kingdom.

So when it comes to temptation, we have to ask ourselves, "why is this coming to me at this point?" Are you tired, physically drained, emotionally spent, deeply saddened, or are you ready to give up? These are the times when the devil is ready to pounce on you; these are the times it becomes easy to forget the greater narrative that God is establishing in the world. In order for us to be a part of this, we have to continue to repel the devil, as Jesus did, by simply evoking the name of God in our prayers and in our lives.



## Notes

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