

Small Groups Discussion

“Trading Places”

Matthew 3:13-4:11

Opening Question:

- What unhealthy food are you most likely to consume too much of? Under what circumstances?

This week, in our walk through the Big Story of the Bible, we’re looking at the test that happens in the life of Jesus just before he launches out in his public ministry.

Read Matthew 3:13-15

- All four Gospel writers mention the baptism of Jesus. What does that fact tell us?
- The interchange between Jesus and John here gives insight into why Jesus asked John to baptize him. Why did Jesus do this?
 - Hint: It wasn’t just to set an example, and it wasn’t because he needed to be cleansed from sin.
 - Hint: It has to do with one of the symbolic meanings of baptism: the waters represent the judgment of God against sinful humanity. We see clear pictures of this in the Old Testament stories of the flood, where God sends water to judge sinful humanity, and graciously saves one family; or in the Exodus, where God uses the waters of the Red Sea to exact judgment on Pharaoh and his army, while he graciously brings the Israelites through on dry land.
 - Leaders: Jesus is giving a picture of the essence of his mission. He came to “trade places” with sinful humanity—to take our place in the “waters” of God’s judgment so that we could share in his identity as a child of God, as well as his eternal inheritance.

Read Matthew 3:16-17

- What is the import of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus? (See Isaiah 61:1-3 if you need help; it serves to confirm who he is AND to empower his mission).
- Why did Jesus need to hear the words of God in v. 17? What would the value of this statement be for Jesus, as he launched out on his rescue mission? At a human level, what does it do for us when we hear our parents publicly declare their love and approval for us?
 - Leaders: God is confirming Jesus’ identity—he is, indeed, the much-loved Son of God, and God is well pleased with him.
- Pastor Josh stated that there was a second, more hidden meaning in the words of God in 3:17, in addition to confirming Jesus’ identity and status with God. It had to do with the Old Testament allusions in these words. Using the following references, try to identify that second meaning.
 - Genesis 22:1-2, 12
 - Isaiah 42:1 (paying attention to the broader context, such as Isaiah 53:4-6). These are the “Suffering Servant Songs.”
 - Leaders: the words of God remind Jesus that the essence of his mission will be to save his people by dying for them.

Transition: this experience at Jesus’ baptism will serve as crucial context for the experience that follows in the wilderness.

Read Matthew 4:1-7

- What does it imply that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted/tested? How could the same event be both a temptation from Satan and a test from God?
- How do you feel about the existence of Satan? Using the CS Lewis quote below, do you tend to fall on one extreme or the other? *“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”* (Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*)
- How do you feel about the fact that Jesus was tempted to sin? Does it change your view of him?
 - Read Hebrews 4:15-16. What do these verses imply about the significance of Jesus being tempted? How is he able to help us?
- What common phrase shows up in each of the first two temptations (v. 3 and 6)? What does this phrase show us about the point at which Satan was attacking Jesus?

- Leaders: The temptation of Jesus attacked his identity as the Son of God.
- How do the words that God has just spoken in Matthew 3:16-17 take on added import in this moment of temptation?
- In what way does Satan’s point of attack resemble his approach with Eve, in Genesis 3:1-5? (Leaders: he was essentially using the same lie—attacking God’s disposition toward his children, or their identity in his sight).
- Why might the first temptation have carried appeal for Jesus in this moment?
- When Jesus responds to the first temptation, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3.
 - By referring to the wilderness testing of Israel, what might Jesus be implying?
 - How does his tactic offer us a tool to use when faced with temptation?
 - What specific “word from the mouth of God” might Jesus be clinging to in this moment? (Matthew 3:17-18).
- In the second temptation, Satan attacks Jesus on the same point (his identity), and yet departs from the use of a physical appetite.
 - What is he tempting Jesus to do in vv. 4-6?
 - How does Satan show himself especially cunning here? (He tries to beat Jesus at his own game—by quoting Scripture). How can Scripture sometimes even be used to support temptations to sin?
 - When Jesus responds, he quotes Deuteronomy 6:16—again from the wilderness testing of Israel—to rebut Satan. What is his point in this rebuttal? What is the difference between having faith in God to do come through in the difficulty of life, vs. “testing” him in this sense?

Read Matthew 4:8-11

- Ultimately, Satan was trying to accomplish one goal in all three temptations, though we see that goal most clearly in the third one. What was Satan trying to get Jesus to do in vv. 8-9?
 - How does this relate to the first promise God made, in Genesis 3:15? (The passage known as the *protoevangelium*, or first gospel.)
 - What common themes do you see in the attempt from Peter to deter Jesus? The Garden of Gethsemane? The people yelling at him on the cross?
 - Leaders: Satan was trying to get Jesus to avoid the way of the cross, and take an approach to being Messiah that didn’t involve suffering. Satan knew that if Jesus went all the way to the cross, that his head would be crushed (Gen. 3:15), and Jesus would accomplish the Great Rescue. If Jesus took the bait, he would not have been able to act as our substitute, and trade places with us in taking God’s judgment.
- In his response to the third temptation, Jesus quotes Deut. 6:13. This verse is a succinct statement of “the Shema,” in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, or the perfectly pleasing life before God. By resisting Satan in this moment, Jesus is demonstrating that he will live just that kind of life on our behalf.
 - How does Jesus here show himself to be the Second Adam, who passed the test that the First Adam failed? How does he show himself to be the True Israel, who passed the tests that the first Israel failed? How does this observation show his sufficiency to trade places with us?

Application

- Read John 1:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. What do these verses indicate about how God views us, if we have received what Jesus did for us?
- Pastor Josh made this claim: “Freedom from the allure of temptation will come when you believe that Jesus succeeded on your behalf—that he took the test for you—and gave you a new identity.” How does this work in real life?
 - From Sunday’s sermon: “Here’s the key to resisting that temptation, whatever it is: to hear God saying to you what he said to Jesus: “You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter. I am pleased with you.””
 - How does this affirmation free us from the power of temptation?
 - How can we drive this good news down into our hearts on a daily basis?
- If you have time, consider how this event played into Jesus’ future confrontations with demons. See Matt. 12:22-29. What confidence does this observation give us in combatting the forces of darkness?

Share concerns and pray for one another. *This would be a good week to split into gender groups for sharing and prayer.* Are there specific temptations that you are currently facing, for which you would like prayer?