

Matthew 3:13 – 4:11

^{3:13} Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted him. ¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’ ^{4:1} Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ ⁴ But he answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’’ ⁵ Then the devil took him into the holy city and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you’; and ‘on their hand they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’’ ⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall 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 glory; ⁹ and he said to him, ‘All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.’ ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.’’ ¹¹ Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him.

Cultural Background

- Baptism was based on the Old Testament pattern of God forming people into new life through water. It’s a symbol of becoming or joining God’s true humanity. Notice:

Adam and Eve	Noah & family	Israel
<small>Gen.1:2</small> the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters ... ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (God then placed humanity in a garden land .)	<small>Gen.7:24</small> The water prevailed upon the earth one hundred and fifty days. ^{8:1} But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided. (Noah then planted a garden .)	<small>Ex.14:29</small> But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians... (Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years until God placed them in the garden land .)

- Baptism was a rite of passage for Gentile converts into Judaism. It represented God cleansing a person from sin through that person’s repentance, and new birth as a new person into the community of God’s people, Israel.
- Therefore, John the Baptist was making a fairly radical statement by calling for *Jews* to be baptized.

Questions (shorter session: Jesus retells our story)

1. What do you think this whole experience was like for Jesus? Gather ideas, impressions.
2. What is Jesus communicating through the symbol of baptism?
 - a. He's becoming God's true human being. Everyone else before him failed.
 - b. First, the surprising thing is that John the Baptist is baptizing Jews. Why? He was supposed to be baptizing Gentiles only! To say that Jews needed to be baptized, too, was radical. The second surprising thing is that Jesus gets baptized. Why did Jesus get baptized? What did it mean to 'fulfill all righteousness' (3:15)? Did he have sin to confess and repent of?
 - c. Jesus did not have sinful actions or thoughts of his own, but Jesus took on the same human nature we have, which was a corrupted human nature. Jesus needed to confess the sinfulness of that human nature.
 - d. Jesus was cleansing his human nature and transforming it all the way through his life, death, and resurrection, so he could share his new human nature to be shared with us for our sakes.
 - e. Jesus is symbolizing his own death and resurrection. He is looking ahead to that, and being prepared for it. He is going to offer us salvation from ourselves by giving us himself!
3. Why does the Spirit lead Jesus into *the wilderness*?
 - a. What happened in the wilderness before? Israel had been there, too, for 40 years, after being 'baptized' in the Red Sea. So the wilderness was part of Israel's foundational story. Notice that Jesus quotes *exclusively* from Deuteronomy [8:3; 6:16; 6:13], so we know he's thinking about that part of Israel's story. (Moses gave Deuteronomy to Israel while they were all wandering in the wilderness.)
 - b. What is the U.S. foundational story? What if Jesus sailed from England to Plymouth, MA on a ship called the Mayflower and started to deal kindly with the Native Americans (who are still there today)? If he intended to redo the U.S. but undo its sin, that's what he would do.
 - c. MAJOR POINT: So Jesus is redoing Israel's foundational story but undoing its sin. Jesus is the 'new Israel' who was going to succeed where Israel failed.
 - i. Illus: When Jesus came into my life, he began to re-tell my story and re-live my story to undo patterns of sin in my life. The most powerful instance of this was during the summer after my junior year of college. That was the time my parents finally decided to get their divorce. My dad's drinking had escalated to an alarming place. Now my way of dealing with my family, ever since 10th grade, was to leave. After I got my driver's license and my car keys, I was out of there. I'd go over to a park or to a friend's place to distract myself. I didn't even have a thought for my younger sister, who was four years younger than me, who I left at home to deal with the mess I didn't want to deal with. But that summer, I felt Jesus say to me, 'I want you to stay.' I said to him, 'I don't have the strength to do that. If what you said is true, Jesus, then you need to be here in me, living your life out through me.' And he did. My parents couldn't afford a lawyer, so they had me arbitrate who gets what. I remember going into that time saying, 'I can't do this!' But during that time, Jesus filled me with a sense of his love for me. And he gave me his love for my parents. I was able to listen sensitively to both of them. In fact, every other time before that, my response to them was, 'You have to stay together – for my sake' or 'You have to get a divorce – for my sake.' But I had never considered it for their sakes. Jesus helped me separate myself from my parents' marriage so they could make a decision that was best for them. Jesus gave me his love for my parents. He gave me his strength to stay at home. He gave me insights so I could counsel my sister with what she was feeling. At the end of that summer, I was talking to my friend Malcolm, whose family had gone through a similar thing earlier. I told him what I was experiencing and how I was meeting Jesus throughout it all, and he said these words to me that I'll never forget: 'Mako, how can you be so

other-centered at a time like this?’ I treasure those words as a reminder to me of the difference Jesus makes.

- ii. Illus: Somehow, we know that in all good stories, the happy ending doesn’t just come out of nowhere. It replays the mess ups people had done before. Like with Anakin and Luke Skywalker. How many of you are Star Wars fans? Do you notice that Luke repeats motifs from his father Anakin’s life. In Anakin’s duel with Count Dooku, Anakin loses his green lightsaber, but he also has Obi-Wan Kenobi’s blue lightsaber. During the fight, a power cord is cut, which turns the lights off. So Anakin and Dooku fight in a blue and red lightsaber duel, with blue and red lights reflected in their faces. In that duel, young Anakin loses his right hand. Of course, Anakin later chooses the dark side and becomes Darth Vader. Luke Skywalker replays his father Anakin’s story, but redeems it. He has a blue lightsaber, and with it fights Darth Vader, who now has a red lightsaber. So Luke and Darth Vader fight in a blue and red lightsaber duel, with blue and red lights reflected on their faces. They are in a dark room, and replay the same moves that Anakin and Dooku did. In that duel, young Luke Skywalker loses his right hand. So the stories parallel each other. But Luke later does not choose the dark side. He stays on the good side of the force and redeems his father, yes, but also his father’s story. The victory echoed the defeats of the past, but reversed them.
- iii. Illus: In *The Lord of the Rings*, there are a number of retellings of its own story. Bilbo gives Frodo the Ring on his birthday (they share a birthday). He does this freely, so Frodo does not become haunted by some memory of desiring the Ring. This is a reversal of Smeagol/Gollum killing Deagol to get the Ring from him, on the pretense that Deagol should have given him the Ring, since it was his birthday. Then, Aragorn retells his ancestor Isildur’s story. He is the heir of Isildur, and has the same weakness common to all men, but refuses to take the Ring when Frodo offers it to him. Then, Gandalf retells Saruman’s story. He stays faithful to his task as one of the Istari. And when he returns, he wears the white robes of the leader of the Council, because Saruman had betrayed that role. Gandalf says, ‘I am Saruman. Saruman as he should have been.’ All of these reversals happen because the defeats of the past must be overcome. The victories reverse the defeats.
- iv. Illus: The Red Sox have a lot of history like that. The Red Sox won the World Series in 1916 and 1918, and then traded Babe Ruth to the NY Yankees in 1920. They didn’t win another championship for 86 years. It was called ‘the curse of the Bambino’, i.e. Babe Ruth, and it seemed true. How many of you know that sad story? Whenever the Red Sox went to either the American League championship or the World Series, they lost through some weird fluke, each time. In 1975, the Sox lost to the Cincinnati Reds in game 7, in the 9th inning, after being ahead 3-0. In 1978, the Sox lost the American League playoff to the Mets. In game 6, Bill Buckner just had to catch the ball and throw it to home, but he let the ball go through his legs, and the Mets scored the winning run. They lost that game, then lost the next game and lost the World Series. In 2003, in the American League championship, the Sox were beating the Yankees in the 8th inning of game 7. They were up 5-2. But the Yankees won in the 9th 6 – 5. It did seem like the Red Sox were just cursed. No matter how well they did, something tragic always happened. But in 2004, as we all know, the Red Sox won the World Series. But they didn’t just win, they won in such a way that they replayed many of the past events but redeemed them. They beat the Yankees, their arch-rivals, for the American League Championship after the Yankees had already won 3 games. And the amazing thing is that NO ONE has ever come back to win 4 straight games after losing the first 3. Curt Schilling pitched on a bleeding ankle because he had torn sutures because he had torn tendons. And in the World Series, the Red Sox beat the St. Louis Cardinals in 4 straight games. To add a surreal touch to the World Series victory, there was a

total lunar eclipse that colored the moon a deep red color. The moon was red when the Red Sox won the World Series at last. The victory echoed the defeats of the past, but reversed them.

- v. Happy endings don't come out of nowhere – they repair the failures of the past. Adam's race brought evil into the world. Adam's race will help to heal it. Why does it work that way? – Because God is committed to working inside the story. Not from outside it, because He would then overrule humanity's place in the story. He is so committed to us, in love and justice, that this is the way He brings it about. **PRACTICAL APPLICATION:** How do you think Jesus would re-live your life story with you, and heal you and transform you?
4. Possible Applications: Jesus in your story
- a. How has Jesus been retelling your story?
 - b. From what you know of Jesus, how do you think he might want to retell your story?
 - c. (for non-Christians) How else do you think the corruption in human nature can be dealt with, except through Jesus? Here's a comparison of ways that different belief systems have of dealing with human evil
 - i. Change external circumstances, make better laws, let each person work off the evil (through good deeds): (Rabbinic Judaism, Islam, Mormonism)
 - ii. See good and evil as one continuous whole; have no desire for change, but only another world; have no attachments to this life (Hinduism, Zen Buddhism)
 - iii. Transform human nature itself and then offer people a new, fresh, purified humanity. Only with Jesus do we see God someone actually transforming human nature itself. Let's see how God does this.