



Affirmation

JESUS CAME TO FULFILL THE FATHER'S PLAN OF SALVATION.

MATTHEW 3:13–4:11

Think back to the last time you started a new job. Perhaps you felt excitement as well as apprehension. If you went through a new employee orientation, those feelings of apprehension may have been dispelled—or they may have heightened. They might have lingered until the first words of affirmation came out of the mouth of your boss. Words of encouragement are important in any new endeavor.



Why do you think words of affirmation are so important when you embark on a new endeavor?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

MATTHEW 3:1–4:11

The Gospel of Matthew is one of the three Synoptic Gospels, along with Mark and Luke. The word *synoptic* means “with the same eye” or from the same viewpoint. These three Gospel accounts follow a similar order of events and contain many of the same teachings of Jesus. The fourth Gospel, John, approaches the ministry and teaching of Jesus from a different viewpoint. All four Gospels, though, are the account of God’s intervention in history to provide His redemption to sinful humanity through His Son.

Matthew began his Gospel with the announcement and birth of Jesus. The account of Jesus’s ministry begins in chapter 3, some thirty years later. In rapid succession, Matthew tells of three key events that launched Jesus’s ministry—the appearance of John the Baptist, Jesus’s baptism, and His temptation in the wilderness.

John the Baptist is introduced in chapter 3. While John the Baptist’s central purpose was to direct attention to the coming Messiah, we must not lose sight of the fact that John was a mighty prophet. In fact, he was the first prophet in over four hundred years among the Jewish people. As a result, the Jewish people turned out in great numbers to see and hear John.

John played two roles in God’s plan of redemption. First, he was a direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming Messiah. Prophecy concerning John is found in Malachi 3:1, “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me.” Second, John was a herald of the good news that God’s Messiah had arrived. His preaching called for people to prepare for the Messiah through repentance and a baptism that illustrated repentance. Continually, John called attention to the fact that “one . . . more powerful” than him was coming.



Read Matthew 3:1–4:11 in your Bible. Highlight all the affirmations of Jesus’s identity. What do John the Baptist, the Father, the Spirit, and the angels reveal about Jesus?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

OBEYING GOD (MATT. 3:13-17)

¹³ **Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.** ¹⁴ **But John tried to stop him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?”** ¹⁵ **Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.”** Then John allowed him to be baptized.

¹⁶ **When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him.**

¹⁷ **And a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”**

VERSE 13

With remarkable understatement, Matthew introduced the Messiah with a simple statement: ***Then Jesus came from •Galilee.*** Jesus came purposefully to the Jordan River from Nazareth (Mark 1:9) to be baptized by John. This was the inaugural event in the ministry of the Messiah. This baptism was the climax of John’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’s ministry. From this point forward, John would decrease, and Jesus would increase (John 3:30).

John’s message was repentance (Matt. 3:2). This repentance was demonstrated through the act of baptism. Because of the nature of John’s baptism, he was surprised when Jesus came to be baptized by him. Most likely, John knew of the divine identity of Jesus. No doubt, John’s parents, Elizabeth and Zechariah, had shared with him the events surrounding the birth of Jesus (see Luke 1:39-45).

VERSES 14-15

At first, John resisted the request from Jesus. No, ***I need to be baptized by you.*** This was an admission by John of his own sinfulness. Jesus, seemingly ignoring John’s request, stated that His own baptism by John was necessary as ***the way . . . to fulfill all righteousness.*** This statement is filled with much meaning. First, Jesus, fully God and fully man, was baptized in order to identify with the sinfulness of humanity. Jesus, who would be the sacrifice for sin, identified with sinners by being baptized as they were. Second, Jesus was identifying Himself with the ministry of

John, the forerunner of the Messiah, thus linking their ministries together. Third, Jesus's baptism demonstrated His commitment to fulfill the mission for which He came into the world. Therefore, it was an act of obedience to the Father and gives to us an example of obedience.

VERSES 16-17

Based on the language in verse 16, Jesus's baptism was by immersion. The Greek word **baptized** means to "dip or submerge under water." It is a word that was used in ancient Greek literature of a boat that was sunk in battle. The mode of immersion paints the picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Immersion is the biblical form of baptism. For example, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him," then "they came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39).

Immediately following Jesus's baptism, the heavens **opened** and two signs of God's affirmation of His Son appeared. First, there was a symbol **like a dove** descending on Jesus. Note the word *like*. This was not a dove but something like a dove; it was a symbol of the Spirit of God on Jesus. Second, God the Father spoke words of affirmation describing Jesus as His **beloved Son** in whom He was **well-pleased**. At the baptism of Jesus is clearly pictured God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The three Persons of the Trinity are distinct but without division of nature or essence.



What is the purpose of baptism in a believer's life?



KEY DOCTRINE: *Baptism*

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. (See Acts 2:41-42; Romans 6:3-5.)

HEARING GOD (MATT. 4:1-4)

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” ⁴ He answered, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

VERSE 1

Following His baptism, Jesus was *led up by the Spirit* into a harsh *wilderness* environment. Scholars point to the Wilderness of Judea, a desolate area between the Dead Sea and Jerusalem, as a possible location for this incident.

Why would the Spirit lead Jesus into a situation where He would be tempted by *the devil*? At the outset of His ministry, Jesus faced the issue of what kind of Messiah He would be. Popular opinion believed the Messiah would be a national leader, freeing the Jewish people from Rome. But God’s plan was different. The Messiah would come to save us from our sins. Jesus was determined to carry out the Father’s plan. This resolve, however, would be tested. This test came at the hands of the devil.

DID YOU KNOW?

Names and titles for the devil in the New Testament include devil (Matt. 4:1), tempter (Matt. 4:3), the evil one (Matt. 13:19), Satan (Matt. 4:10), Beelzebul (Mark 3:22), the father of lies (John 8:44), murderer (John 8:44), Belial (2 Cor. 6:15), ruler of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), adversary (1 Pet. 5:8), roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), serpent (Rev. 12:9), and accuser (Rev. 12:10).

VERSES 2-3

During this period of temptation, Jesus fasted and prayed as He focused on doing God’s will. After *forty days and forty nights*, Matthew made the simple declaration, *he was hungry*. The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that He was human as well as divine.

Hunger often leads to physical, mental, and spiritual weakness. It was at this moment, when Jesus perhaps was most vulnerable, that the devil sought to sidetrack God’s plan of redemption.

What form Satan took we do not know. Regardless, this was a real confrontation with a real enemy.

The devil's words, ***If you are the Son of God***, are best translated, "Since you are God." Satan didn't doubt that Jesus is God. Instead, he implied: "Use your powers for your own benefit. After all, you're God." This was a temptation to use His powers to meet His own needs rather than trust in God's provision. Breaking His fast in this manner would have been an act of disobedience.

VERSE 4

Jesus responded to Satan's attack by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. In essence, Jesus affirmed that our physical needs are not our most crucial needs. The Word of God and the will of God as revealed in His Word are the most important things in all of life. This was a declaration of commitment to God's plan. Jesus would not be lured from His allegiance to God. He affirmed loyalty to God above physical satisfaction. His example of using Scripture, the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17), serves to remind us that we can face temptation with the Word of God.



How have you found strength and encouragement in God's Word?

TRUSTING GOD (MATT. 4:5-7)

⁵ **Then the devil took him to the holy city, 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 give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."** ⁷ **Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."**

VERSES 5-6

After failing to persuade Jesus to use His divine power for His own benefit, Satan brought Jesus to Jerusalem to the ***pinnacle of the temple***. This could refer to the portico of Solomon, a high flat roof area that overlooked the Kidron Valley, some 450 feet below.

Jesus defeated Satan in round one by quoting the Word of God. Satan now tried to turn the tables on Jesus by using the Word of

God himself. His implication was: “Jesus, if you believe so strongly in Scripture, then use the Word of God to prove that You are the Son of God.” Quoting from Psalm 91:11-12, Satan challenged Jesus to throw Himself off the top of the temple into the valley below. “After all, God’s Word says He will protect you and you won’t be injured. That will prove that you are God’s Son!”

In the first temptation, Jesus refused to use His power to prove that He was the Son of God. Here, Satan was saying, “If you won’t use your own power, how about using your Father’s power to prove you are God’s Son.” Jumping from the height of 450 feet without being injured would be such a spectacular occurrence in the eyes of the hundreds of temple worshipers that they would immediately realize Jesus was the Messiah.

What is notable is that Satan misused Scripture, taking verses out of context. The psalm speaks of a life lived in God’s will. When our lives are lived in His will, God can be counted on to protect and provide for us. For Jesus to misuse this verse and jump off the temple in a spectacular fashion would place Him outside of God’s will.

VERSE 7

Again, Jesus rejected the temptation of the devil to take an easy approach to His ministry. Quoting this time from Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus spoke of the danger of presuming on God to watch over us when we venture outside of His plan for our lives.

The lesson is simple: don’t attempt to put God in a position where He has to come through for you. Don’t box Him in a corner and expect Him to act as you desire. Once more, Jesus resisted the onslaught of Satan by using God’s Word in proper context.



What are some ways people might try to put God to the test in our culture? What biblical truths about God can we always count on?

WORSHIPING GOD (MATT. 4:8-11)

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve

only him.”¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

VERSES 8-9

Satan approached Jesus for the third time with a new proposition. Satan dropped the premise, “If you are the Son of God.” Such a statement no longer fit with this next proposal. This would be a temptation directly to Jesus to abandon His allegiance to His heavenly Father.

The devil took Jesus to a tall mountain. From there, he showed Jesus ***all the kingdoms of the world***. These *kingdoms* represented all that Satan controlled—the governments, the economies, and world systems that God allows Satan to rule. Their ***splendor*** would represent that which was glitzy and appealing about all the worldly things these kingdoms possessed. These would be Satan’s to give since he was the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31).

Satan tempts Christians today using the same tactics. He attempts to seduce us with promises of success, prosperity, and health. The price, however, involves selling out to him.

What Satan was offering Jesus was a shortcut that avoided the cross.

Jesus did not need what the devil was offering. The kingdoms of this world were rightfully His already. The kingdoms and the glory would be His because of His death and resurrection (Rev. 11:15). What Satan was offering Jesus was a shortcut that avoided the cross. Satan was offering a way for Jesus to be “King of Kings” without suffering the pain and humiliation of the cross.

VERSE 10

Jesus’s answer was simple: No! Again, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus told Satan to “Get lost. God alone is worthy of worship and service.” In His answer, Jesus pointed out that worship and service go together. What we worship, we also serve, whether it is God the Creator or materialism or other gods of this world.

Satan only has power by God’s permission. Therefore, at Jesus’s command to ***go away***, Satan had no choice but to leave. In this act of commanding Satan, Jesus exercised the authority and power that Satan had tried to seduce Him into using.

VERSE 11

This would not be the last time for Satan to tempt Him. There would be more occasions of Satan trying to sidetrack Jesus's mission. Among those instances would be the rebuke of Peter (Matt. 16:21-23) and the agony of Gethsemane (26:36-46). After Satan's departure, God sent angels to meet the physical needs of Jesus that He had refused to do for Himself in verse 4.



What challenges our worship of God alone? How can we overcome those challenges?



BIBLE SKILL: *Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.*

Make a chart with two columns. Title one column "Temptations" and the second column "Responses." In the first column, describe aspects of each of Satan's temptations. Do the same with Jesus's responses in the second column. List ways Satan tempts believers today. Find Scripture you can use to meet each of the listed temptations.

Temptations	Responses

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers are called to demonstrate obedience through baptism by immersion.
- + We can rely on Scripture to find strength and resist temptation.
- + We can trust God's faithfulness without demanding miracles.
- + We must acknowledge God alone as worthy of our worship.



There is strength in numbers. How can your group members support and encourage one another as they face life's temptations? How can you build accountability in your group?



The psalmist said this: "I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). How can you apply this verse in your life? Develop a plan and strategy for memorizing Scripture that will help you stand against temptation. Start by memorizing Matthew 3:17.



Memorize Matthew 3:17.

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.