

Last week, we looked at Jesus' birth and ended with His Baptism, the starting point for His public ministry. This week we'll take a look at Jesus' teaching ministry. But first, we begin with an important test. But, don't worry! It's not a test you have to take. No, it's a test that Jesus had to take and the only way for Him to pass was with a completely perfect score.

So, after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness where He fasted forty days and nights. And He was tempted by Satan. In reality, our entire human race was getting a "do-over" of that first temptation where Adam and Eve failed—and every temptation that has struck you and me, temptations we frequently follow, disobeying God and deserving His eternal punishment. And remember, Jesus wasn't allowed to get even one wrong on this test. If Jesus wins, we all benefit; if He fails, we are all forever lost.

At the end of those forty days, Jesus felt His great hunger. The devil tempted Him: "If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." (Matthew 4:3) That *sounds* reasonable. Who *wouldn't* be hungry after forty days without food? And how can Jesus save the world if He dies of hunger first? But He answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

Jesus knew Satan was tempting Him to distrust His Father. Jesus knew His Father and trusted Him to feed Him when the time was right. "Then the devil took Him to the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple & 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 hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" (5-6)

Jesus had declared His trust in His Father and Satan basically said, "Prove it." This was a brilliant temptation. In fact, if Jesus didn't jump, it would look like He didn't trust His Father. Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:7)

Jesus used the Bible masterfully. He didn't need to prove the faith and trust in His heart—His Father knew, and that was all that mattered: "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9)

This was the most similar to the temptation to Eve. Do as I say, trust me, and I will give you power and wealth galore! But Jesus saw through this temptation too: "Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left

Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him” (Matthew 4:10–11).

Thanks be to God; Jesus passed the test!

When our first parents, Adam and Eve, gave in to Satan’s temptation and ate the forbidden fruit, they failed- big time! They shattered creation, and our whole human family fell from God’s grace. But in Jesus Christ we received a new chance. Jesus held firm and obedient to His Father through every single one of Satan’s temptations over that stretch of forty days. His perfect obedience gave us a new beginning.

Afterward, He gathered some disciples or followers and returned to Galilee, the northern region of Israel, and began His public ministry. Jesus’ disciples were an important part of His ministry. You can think of them as apprentices or students. Jesus had hundreds of disciples or followers, but He specifically chose and called the Twelve. These would be eyewitnesses of His teachings and His mighty miracles, also His death & resurrection. He would fill them with the Holy Spirit, and they would be His witnesses. Their teachings & writings would be the foundation for Jesus’ New Testament Church, & they would write and oversee the writing of the NT.

Matthew describes Jesus’ ministry in Galilee: “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:35–36).

Jesus went from village to village throughout Galilee teaching and performing miracles. Jesus’ teaching started the same as John the Baptist’s teaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Both taught people to recognize their sins and repent of them—that is, to regret the times they broke God’s Laws and seek to change their lives in obedience to God. He assured them of God’s mercy and grace and promised them forgiveness for all their sins. Jesus had His disciples baptize believers.

Jesus’ pattern was to teach in synagogues on the Sabbath Day, Saturday, and then spend the rest of the week teaching in the city squares and visiting people’s homes when they invited Him. When He was in Jerusalem for the required festivals, He taught in the temple courts. Jesus’ teachings focused on God’s tremendous grace and love for all sinners and His full and free forgiveness, which required nothing from us.

Jesus’ parables were some of His greatest teaching tools. He told lively, memorable stories of everyday people, places, and events—a farmer scattering seed, a shepherd and his sheep, a man with his two sons, a king inviting his

subjects to be guests at his son's wedding banquet. But these stories taught heavenly truths to His followers, truths which often turned the people's thinking and expectations upside down. He would speak of lowly and despised people receiving God's grace while wealthy, well-respected, and prominent Jewish leaders were sent away empty-handed by God because they were confident in their own works.

Jesus also worked great miracles which showed God's Kingdom & the Messiah had come among them. His healing miracles showed His concern for our physical well-being and foreshadowed the perfect, eternal healing He will bring when He returns on the Last Day to restore creation. He restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, mobility to paralytics, and He cured palsied limbs. He cleansed lepers, *as in this account from Mark's Gospel: "And a leper came to Him, imploring Him, and kneeling said to Him, "If You will, You can make me clean." Moved with pity, He stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean" (Mark 1:40-42).*

During His ministry, Jesus also drove out demons—the fallen angels who rebelled against God and lost their home in heaven. Ever since Satan's intrusion in the Garden of Eden, they have been seeking to destroy God's creation and turn people from faith. This includes possessing people as we heard in our Gospel lesson from Luke. Jesus drove demons out of people with a word, a command; and since He was their Creator and Lord, they had no choice but to obey Him. This foreshadowed Judgment Day when He will drive the fallen angels from His creation and punish them in hell for all eternity.

Jesus also worked great miracles to demonstrate His authority over creation and His power to completely restore it on the Last Day. He stilled strong storms and waves with a command: "And when He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but He was asleep. And they went and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." And He said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then He rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?" (Matthew 8:23-27)

Jesus even demonstrated His power over **death** during His ministry. Three times the Gospels record Jesus raising people from the dead. The third involved a family who was close to Him: "Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take

away the stone.” ... So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that You sent Me.” When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go” (John 11:38-39, 41-44). These miracles of raising the dead demonstrated Jesus’ power over death, not to mention His own resurrection on the third day after His crucifixion and death.

Though great crowds gathered around Him, Jesus faced increasing opposition and persecution from Jewish leaders who falsely taught the way to God’s presence was obedience to the customs and rules developed by the Jewish rabbis or teachers. Jesus exposed their self-righteous hypocrisy and condemned their useless teachings.

But probably the thing that angered them the most was the way Jesus would perform His miracles on the Sabbath Day when their traditions insisted on Jews refraining from any form of work. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was a day for God to work giving people rest from their sins and teaching them about His great love and mercy. Since Jesus was the Son of God, it was fitting for the Son of God to provide these divine miracles on the Sabbath Day.

As Jesus’ ministry continued, the opposition from the Jewish religious leaders intensified, setting Him on a collision course when they came together at the great spring Passover festival in Jerusalem. That will be our focus next week. Amen.