

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 6, Matthew 3-4

Podcast Audio Overview

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All right, let's jump into this deep dive, and we're going to be looking at the Gospel of Matthew. Okay. Chapters three and four.

Great. And our main source material is this lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. Wonderful scholar.

Yeah. And we're going to be looking at some pretty momentous occasions in Jesus' life, so we're looking at his baptism, the temptation in the wilderness, and then the launching of his ministry in Galilee. It's amazing how relevant those things still are today, isn't it? Yeah, absolutely.

Thousands of years later. Yeah. And this is really just a crash course into the meaning of those events and why it matters to us today.

Right. So jumping right in, let's go to the baptism of Jesus. And you might think, well, Jesus, the Son of God, needs to be baptized.

That's kind of strange, right? It is interesting. And scholars have pointed out it's a great example of what's often called the criterion of embarrassment. Okay.

The idea is, if the Gospel writers were just making things up to make Jesus look good, they wouldn't include something that might raise questions or look a little bit awkward. The fact that they did include it suggests that they were committed to telling the story honestly, awkward bits and all. That makes a lot of sense.

And on that note, John the Baptist, he's really hesitant to baptize Jesus. He even says, I need to be baptized by you. What's going on there? What does that tell us about how John saw Jesus? Well, I think it shows that he understood that Jesus was somebody far greater than himself.

Right. John had been preaching that someone was coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. John's water baptism was a baptism of repentance, of getting ready for that.

He recognized that his own baptism paled in comparison. Makes sense. So we've got the Son of God getting baptized by a guy who says he's not even worthy to untie his sandals.

And then things get even more interesting. The Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove, and a voice comes from heaven. Dr. Keener calls that a bat call.

Exactly. Which is a divine voice that echoes Scripture. Exactly.

And it's echoing some really significant passages here. Looks like Psalm 2, where God says, you are my son. And Isaiah 42.1, which talks about the suffering servant.

Okay. So right from the start, we get these hints about who Jesus is, both king and suffering servant, destined for glory and for pain. Wow.

A lot packed into a pretty short scene. So Jesus has this big moment of affirmation and then, bam, he's led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Yeah.

And he faces some temptations. It's powerful, isn't it? Yeah. It reminds us, even after really profound spiritual experiences, we can still face temptation.

We can still face challenges. Yeah, for sure. And Dr. Keener, he really emphasizes that each temptation Jesus faces is a challenge to his identity and his mission as a son of God.

That's right. So let's break down these temptations. So first, he's tempted to turn stones into bread.

Okay. What's the deeper meaning there? It's about trusting God's provision rather than relying on his own power. Right.

Because if you're hungry in the wilderness and you're the Son of God, you would think I'd be making some bread, but instead he trusts God to provide. Absolutely. Even in the tough times.

Even when it's hard. And then there's this crazy temptation to jump from the temple. Yeah.

What was that all about? That one's about seeking spectacular signs rather than faithful obedience. The devil is essentially saying, put on a show, prove your power by doing something miraculous. Right, right.

But Jesus knows that genuine faith isn't about drawing attention to yourself or trying to manipulate God. It's about humbly obeying God, even when it's not flashy or attention-grabbing. Right.

It's not about making God do what we want. Yeah. It's about trusting God to work things out in his time.

In his way. Yeah. And then there's the last temptation, the big one: worship Satan and you get all the kingdoms of the world.

It's pretty intense. Yeah. That temptation really gets to the heart of allegiance.

It's choosing genuine worship and loyalty to God rather than seeking power and glory in this world. Right. So he could have had it all.

He could have had it all. But he knew that true power comes from God. That's right.

And he wasn't here to rule the world through force or manipulation, but to serve God and bring about God's kingdom. That's right. And the way Jesus responds to each temptation is interesting.

He doesn't argue with the devil. He doesn't get into some big theological debate. He just quotes Scripture.

That's right. Specifically from Deuteronomy. Exactly.

And that just shows us how powerful Scripture can be in the face of temptation. Yeah. We can use scripture to combat the lies that are being thrown at us.

That's right. And to stay rooted in the truth. Absolutely.

And Dr. Kiener points out something else really interesting here. The devil tries to use scripture too. Yeah, he does.

But he twists it out of context, trying to manipulate Jesus with it. Right. Yeah.

It's like this foreshadowing of how people will misuse scripture throughout history to justify all kinds of things. Their own agendas. Yeah.

And it reminds us to be really careful readers of the Bible. Yes. You know, to always consider the context.

That's right. The overall message of Scripture. Absolutely.

Because it's not just a book of magic spells to be used for our own purposes. Exactly. It's a story of God's love and redemption.

And we need to understand that in its entirety. That's right. So we've seen Jesus face these temptations.

And then Dr. Kiener brings up a very interesting connection between Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness. Yeah. And the Israelites wandering for 40 years.

That's right. What do you make of that? I think it suggests that testing and perseverance are part of God's plan for his people. Okay.

Even Jesus wasn't exempt from this. Right. Right.

Think of other figures in the Bible. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David. They all went through trials before fulfilling their calling.

Right. It's almost like a refining process. Yeah.

Preparing them for what God has called them to. And in the middle of this whole discussion on facing hardship, Dr. Kiener throws in this personal story that I found very moving. Yes.

Where he's going through this time of intense testing in his own life. And it sounds like he feels very alone. Yeah.

He's questioning everything. And then he talks about how God really spoke to him through those stories in the Bible. Right.

Of those who went through similar things, like Elijah, David, Jeremiah. Yeah. It's like he found comfort.

Yeah. In knowing he wasn't alone in his suffering. Right.

That others had walked this road before him. And that's something I think we can all relate to. Absolutely.

Because we all go through seasons of testing. Right. And doubt, seasons of wandering.

Yeah. But these stories remind us that even in those times, God is with us. Yeah.

His grace is sufficient. That's right. He doesn't promise to take away our pain or make everything easy.

No. But he's there. He's there.

He promises to be there every step of the way. That's a promise we can hold onto even when we don't understand what God is doing or why we're going through what we're going through. And after the wilderness, Jesus shifts his focus to Galilee.

Okay. Now, Galilee wasn't exactly a hub for religious or political power. Yeah.

And it was actually kind of looked down on by those in Jerusalem. Right. Why do you think Jesus chose to start his ministry in such a place? Galilee was really like Judea's frontier, wasn't it? Yeah.

A real mixture of cultures. Yeah. A little bit rough around the edges.

Yeah. I think Dr. Kiener suggests a few reasons why Jesus might have chosen to begin there. Okay.

First, his hometown of Nazareth had already rejected him. Okay. And then Capernaum, which was this bustling city on the Sea of Galilee, offered a lot of opportunities to connect with a wider range of people.

So it's almost like he's taking his message to the margins. Yeah. To those who are often overlooked.

Right. And dismissed. Yeah.

By the religious elite. Absolutely. And just a reminder that God's love and grace are for everyone.

That's right. No matter their social standing or background. That's right.

And you remember how Dr. Kiener addresses that theory from Walter Grunman? I do. Who claimed Jesus was a Gentile because he was from Galilee.

And as it turns out, Walter Grunman was a Nazi theologian. Oh, yeah. Who was trying to erase Jesus's Jewish identity.

It's a good reminder for us to be aware of the biases that can influence scholarship, to be critical thinkers, to examine sources carefully, and consider the historical and cultural context. Absolutely. So Jesus sets up shop in Capernaum, and we have this great scene where he calls his first disciples.

Yeah. These everyday guys. Fishermen.

He calls them to leave everything and follow him. It's pretty radical, isn't it? That's a pretty radical invitation. It was not the norm in the ancient world for teachers to go around seeking disciples.

Right. They would wait for students to come to them. Right.

It highlights the radical nature of Jesus's call. Right. He saw the potential in these ordinary people.

Right. A potential they might not even have seen in themselves. Right.

And he invited them to be a part of something extraordinary. And he didn't just say, hey, come check this out sometime. No.

He said, drop everything and follow me now. That's right. And Dr. Keener points out how shocking that would have been in that culture.

Oh, yeah. You know, to abruptly leave the family business would have been offensive, not only to the family. That's right.

But to society at large. Yeah. You were expected to carry on the family trade to fulfill your obligations to your community.

Right. But Jesus's call demanded a different kind of loyalty, a higher allegiance. And what would it look like for us to answer that call today? Yeah.

To have that level of obedience. That's a great question. What would we be willing to change or rearrange in our lives? It probably looks different for each of us, you know, depending on where God is leading us.

Right. But I think the core principle is the same. Okay.

A willingness to put Jesus first. Right. To make him the center.

Even when it means making difficult choices. Right. Or sacrifices.

And Dr. Keener does say that Jesus wasn't necessarily saying, abandon all your family responsibilities. That's right. You know, he reminds us that Jesus also emphasized honoring your parents.

And being faithful to your spouse. Yeah. But it's about finding that balance.

Right. Right? With Jesus at the center. Exactly.

And he uses that example of the Pharisees. Yeah. Debating about how long a husband could be away from his wife.

Yeah. To study the Torah. Yeah.

So they took family obligations very seriously. But they also recognized that studying the Torah could require long periods of separation. Absolutely.

So it's really about that balance of those competing priorities. We wrestle with that today, don't we? We do. How do we balance our commitment to Jesus with our obligations to our families, our work, our community? That's right.

No easy answers, but it starts with seeking God and trusting him to lead us. That's right. So we've talked about this call to discipleship, but I want to dig into what that discipleship actually looks like in practice.

And Dr. Kiener points to that summary of Jesus's ministry in Matthew 4:23-25, where it says he was teaching, preaching, and healing. Those three things. Yeah.

What can we learn from those actions? Oh, those actions really paint a picture of God's reign breaking into the world. Jesus's teaching challenged the traditional interpretations of the law, revealing God's true heart of compassion and grace. His preaching announced that the good news of the kingdom was here, inviting people to repent and believe.

And then you have the healings, which were these tangible expressions of God's power and love at work. Yeah. So he was really showing people what it meant to live under God's rule.

Exactly. It's about truth. That's right.

Good news. Wholeness. Restoration.

Yeah. And Dr. Kiener emphasized that the healing ministry, especially, would have drawn huge crowds. He compared it to how people in the ancient world would flock to hot springs that they believed had healing properties.

People were desperate for relief from suffering. And Jesus offered a different kind of healing, one that touched not just their physical bodies, but their hearts and souls as well. And speaking of dramatic healings.

Yes. He tells this amazing story about this woman who was so crippled that she couldn't walk. Yeah.

She's dragging herself on the ground. Yeah. And then her mother carries her across a river.

It's amazing. Just to get to Jesus. Can you imagine the faith? I know.

Incredible. And the determination. The length people would go to to encounter Jesus.

Right. And it makes you wonder, how far would we go to encounter Jesus or to bring someone we love to him for healing? What would we be willing to do? Right. And it also

raises the question, why do some people experience those dramatic healings while others don't? Yeah.

That's a tough question, isn't it? And Dr. Kiener acknowledges that. Right. And reminds us that even when we don't have all the answers, we can still trust God.

We can still trust God. That's right. And that's a tough one, isn't it? It is.

Because we want to know why. We want to know why. But sometimes it's just about trusting.

Absolutely. Even when it's hard. Yeah.

Even when it's hard. Yeah. So getting back to Jesus's ministry, Dr. Kiener ends this section by contrasting those crowds who flock to Jesus for healing with the crowds who later shouted, crucify him.

Yeah. Talk about a mood swing. Yeah.

It's a reminder that popularity is fickle. It is, isn't it? And fleeting. One minute they're praising him as a miracle worker.

Right. The next they're calling for his death. It makes you realize you can't build your life on what other people think.

Absolutely. And that's a temptation, isn't it? It is. It's a constant battle, isn't it? Yeah.

Especially today with social media. Oh, yeah. Everything is about image and self-promotion.

That's right. But Dr. Kiener reminds us that true fulfillment doesn't come from the applause of the world. Right.

But from faithfulness to God and his calling on our lives. Yeah. So it's easy to get sidetracked by what other people think.

It is. And measure our success by likes and followers. Yeah.

External validation. But ultimately it's about being faithful. That's right.

To what God has called us to. Yeah. Even when it's not popular.

Right. Even when it's not glamorous. Even when it's not glamorous.

Yeah. So we've covered a lot of ground in this first part of our deep dive. We have.

You know, we've seen the radical nature of Jesus's call. Yeah. The power of his ministry.

Uh-huh. And the importance of grounding our identity in him. Yes.

Not in the fickle approval of the world. That's right. We'll be right back to continue this exploration of Matthew chapters 3 and 4. Looking forward to it.

So, picking up where we left off with Jesus calling those fishermen to follow him. I was struck by how Dr. Keener emphasized just how unusual that was back then. Teachers didn't usually go around looking for disciples.

Yeah. They pretty much waited for the students to come to them. Exactly.

And that really underscores how radical Jesus's invitation was. He wasn't playing by the rules of social status or prestige. It was more about seeing the potential in those ordinary guys.

Absolutely. Potential they might not have even recognized in themselves. And then, remember, he calls them to drop everything and follow him right then and there.

Yeah. No time to wrap things up. No long goodbyes.

Dr. Keener said that in that culture, ditching the family business like that would have been a huge slap in the face. Not just to their families, but to the whole community. They were expected to carry on the family trade, provide for everyone, and fulfill their obligations.

Right. But Jesus demanded a different kind of loyalty. A higher allegiance where he came first, even before those societal expectations.

It really makes you think: what would it look like for us if we felt Jesus calling us to something new? Would we be willing to make such a drastic shift? It's a tough question, isn't it? Maybe we wouldn't literally have to leave our jobs, but what about our comfort zones, the things we cling to for security, the things that define us? That's a good point. Following Jesus might require letting some of that go to make room for a bigger purpose. Though Dr. Keener is careful to point out that Jesus wasn't advocating for ditching all family responsibilities.

Right. He reminds us that Jesus also talked about honoring parents and being faithful to your spouse. It's about recognizing that our connection with Jesus should be the most important relationship in our lives.

Exactly. It's finding that balance, that right order where Jesus is at the center. I like how Dr. Keener brings up that example of the Pharisees arguing about how long a husband could be away from his wife.

Oh, right. To study the Torah. Yeah, it shows how seriously they took family obligations, but also that sometimes studying the Torah required being apart for a while.

It really highlights the tension between competing priorities, something we still deal with today. All the time. How much do we commit to Jesus, to our families, to work, to our community? There's no one-size-fits-all answer.

Definitely not. But I think it starts with listening to God and trusting that he'll guide us in the right direction. So we've talked about the call, but now I'm curious about what following Jesus actually looked like in practice.

Dr. Keener highlighted that summary in Matthew 4.23-25 where it says Jesus was teaching, preaching, and healing. What can we take away from those actions? It's a pretty clear picture of God's reign breaking into the world. His teaching challenged the traditional ways people understood the law, revealing God's true heart.

Then you have the preaching proclaiming that good news of the kingdom, calling people to turn away from their old ways and embrace a new life. And of course, those healings, visible, undeniable expressions of God's power and love working through Jesus. It's like showing people in real time what life under God's rule looks like.

Truth, good news, and that wholeness, that restoration for the broken parts of our lives. Dr. Keener talked about how those healings would draw massive crowds. Absolutely.

He even compared it to how people would flock to those hot springs they believed had healing powers. People were desperate for release. Oh, absolutely.

And Jesus, he offered a different kind of healing, one that addressed the whole person, not just the physical body. Speaking of those powerful healings, he told that incredible story about the woman who was so sick she couldn't even walk. Oh, wow.

Yes. The one where she's dragging herself and her mother carries her across a river to get to Jesus. Just to reach him.

You can't help but be amazed by that kind of faith and sheer determination. It makes you wonder how far we'd be willing to go for that kind of encounter or to bring someone we love to Jesus for healing. Such a good question.

But it also brings up another one that Dr. Keener didn't shy away from. Why do some people experience those dramatic healings while others don't? Yeah, it's tough. And he acknowledges that it's a hard question, but he emphasizes that even when we don't have all the answers, we can still choose to trust God.

Even when we don't understand. Exactly. And it's not always easy, but sometimes it's the only thing we can hold on to.

Back to Jesus's ministry, Dr. Keener points out that contrast, you know, between those crowds who are all about the healings and the ones later on who are yelling, crucify him. Wow. Talk about a shift in public opinion.

It's fickle, isn't it? One minute they're praising him and the next. They want him dead. It's a stark reminder that we can't build our lives around what other people think.

It's so tempting though, isn't it? It is. And today with social media amplifying everything, it's even harder to resist that pull for approval. Dr. Keener really drives home the point that true fulfillment doesn't come from the world's applause, but from being faithful to God's call.

Absolutely. It's so easy to get caught up in those likes and follows, measuring our worth by external validation. But at the end of the day, it's about being true to what God's called us to do.

Even if it's not popular, even if it doesn't win us any awards. Even if it seems small or insignificant. Exactly.

We're called to a different standard. So as we wrap up this part of our exploration, what stands out to you the most? I think it's that reminder that being a disciple, it's not just about believing certain things. It's about aligning our whole lives with Jesus, our priorities, our choices, everything.

It's challenging, but ultimately that's where the true fulfillment lies. Absolutely. It's about surrendering to his leadership, trusting him and being willing to go wherever he leads.

That's a message that's just as relevant today as it was back then. It speaks to that longing we all have for purpose, for meaning, for a life that truly makes a difference. We're going to take a quick break, but then we'll be back to finish up our deep dive into Matthew chapters three and four.

All right. Welcome back to our deep dive into Matthew. As we're wrapping up chapters three and four here, what really stands out to me is how relevant this is to what it means to follow Jesus today.

These chapters really lay the foundation for understanding who Jesus is, what his mission is, and what he's calling us to. Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that's really been on my mind is what Dr. Kiener said about the kingdom of heaven, this whole already not yet idea.

Oh yeah, it's one of those big theological concepts that can be a little tricky to wrap your head around. It really is. So how does this already not yet thing, how does that play out in our lives? What does it look like to live in that in-between space? Well, it means living with a sense of anticipation, knowing that the fullness of God's kingdom is still coming, that time when justice will prevail, when everything will be made right.

But we also have a responsibility, recognizing we're part of making that kingdom a reality right now. So it's like we're representatives of a kingdom that's both here and coming. Like we get glimpses of it breaking through those moments of love, compassion, and justice.

But we're also working towards its full arrival. You got it. And that work, it starts within us, letting God's grace shape our desires, our motivations, making us more like Jesus, who in his life, death and resurrection, perfectly embodied the kingdom.

So it's not about waiting for heaven; it's about bringing heaven to earth, starting with our own actions, our own attitudes. That's it. It reminds us that following Jesus is more than just believing the right things or showing up at church.

It's a total life transformation. And that idea of transformation, it makes me think about what Dr. Keener said about not chasing popularity or looking for the world's approval. That's a tough one, especially today when everything seems to be about image and promoting yourself.

It's a constant struggle, that's for sure. But Dr. Keener reminds us that real fulfillment doesn't come from the world's applause. It comes from being faithful to God's call in our lives.

Right. It's easy to get distracted by what people think, you know, measuring our success by those likes and follows and needing that validation from others. But ultimately, it's about being true to what God wants us to do, even when it doesn't seem glamorous or popular.

Even when it feels small or insignificant in the world's eyes, our main audience should always be God, not public opinion. And that idea is all over Matthew's gospel. You see Jesus constantly challenging the way things are, defying expectations, speaking the truth, even when it's unpopular.

He was never afraid to stand out, to go against the flow. Exactly. He lived a life of radical obedience, trusting God, even when it was hard.

And in the end, that's the kind of life that really matters. A life lived in line with God's purpose. It's the most fulfilling way to live.

Well, as we finish this deep dive, I'm just in awe of Jesus, of what he calls us to. And this amazing reality of his kingdom that's breaking in, but not fully here yet. It's an invitation to an adventure, to be changed, to live a life that's bigger than ourselves, a life that makes a real difference.

So as we go from here, I really encourage you to keep digging into Matthew's gospel. Let it challenge you. Let it inspire you.

Ask yourself, what does it look like to live in this in-between time, this already not yet kingdom? How can we live out its values- love, justice, compassion in our daily lives? Those are great questions to wrestle with. And I think as you seek those answers, as you listen to God's leading, you'll discover a life full of purpose and meaning, a real adventure, something way beyond anything this world can offer. Thank you so much for joining us on this deep dive into Matthew chapters three and four.

We'll be back soon to dive into another fascinating topic. Until then, keep seeking, keep learning, keep exploring.