

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 6,

Matthew 3-4

6-min. Video Overview

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So, before Jesus even begins his public ministry, these two huge events happen that basically set the stage for everything—his baptism and his temptation. And, you know, these aren't just warm-up acts—they're the moments that define the kind of mission he was actually on. Let's really dig into why they matter so much.

And it all boils down to this one single question. I mean, before he could do anything else, this had to be settled. What kind of king was he going to be? Was he going to be a king of brute force and earthly power? A magician who wows the crowds? A political firebrand? Or something totally different? Well, his baptism and temptation give us the answer, loud and clear.

Alright, so the story kicks off not in a palace with a golden crown, but in a muddy river. And for Jesus, getting baptized wasn't about sin. Not at all.

It was this public, divine announcement—a confirmation of who he was. This was the moment God the Father just rips through the fabric of history to say, this is him. And that announcement was absolutely unmistakable.

I mean, there was nothing subtle about it. You have three bam, bam, bam, supernatural things happening all at once—the sky literally gets torn open, the spirit of God comes down, and a voice booms from heaven. This was God's direct, undeniable endorsement.

Okay, so what's the deal with the dove? Well, this symbol is packed with meaning. For anyone listening at the time, their minds would have immediately jumped back to the story of Noah. That dove was a sign of hope, of restoration, of a brand new start for the world.

In the same way, the Spirit showing up like this signals a new age is dawning, a new creation is beginning. And then you have the voice from heaven. And what's so incredible is that it's not just saying one thing.

It brilliantly weaves together two epic Old Testament prophecies. First, from Psalm 2, it declares Jesus is the promised king. This is my son.

But then it immediately pulls from Isaiah 42, identifying him as the suffering servant. So right from the get-go, his mission has this dual identity. He is both king and servant.

So after this amazing spiritual high, this ultimate confirmation from God himself, where does the Spirit lead Jesus? To a victory parade? A party? Nope. Straight into the desert for 40 days of fasting and a face-to-face confrontation. From the peak, straight to the pit.

And this is where we see this really powerful pattern that shows up all through the Bible. It seems like great leaders are almost always tested, and tested hard, before they can step into their calling. Think about it.

Joseph was in a pit, then a prison, before he ruled Egypt. Moses spent 40 years wandering the desert. David was hunted by King Saul.

Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness fit this mold perfectly. Now get this. The devil's attack is laser-focused.

It's not a random scattershot temptation. It's a direct challenge to the exact identity God had just declared back at the river. If you are the Son of God, he's trying to make Jesus doubt and redefine what that sonship actually means, to pull him off the path his father set for him.

So we have to understand that these three temptations aren't just clever little tricks. Each one is an entire worldview, a competing vision of power. They represent three different kinds of kingdoms Jesus could have chosen to build, if only he'd take the bait.

Okay, temptation number one. It's a direct appeal to his most basic, urgent need. I mean, Jesus has been fasting for 40 days.

He's starving. The offer seems so reasonable. Use your divine power for yourself.

Just make some bread. But this isn't just about food. It's a model of power based on self-service, not on trusting God.

But Jesus' comeback? Oh, it's perfect. He quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, which is all about Israel's own time of testing in the wilderness. And he makes it clear.

His trust is entirely in his father's provision. He's choosing dependence on God over using his own power for himself. The second challenge is all about putting on a show.

The devil says, leap from the highest point of the temple. Make the angels catch you in front of everyone. It's a temptation to be a spectacle, to manipulate God and force his hand to prove who you are with a dramatic, sensational stunt.

And once again, Jesus just shuts it down. He quotes Deuteronomy again, making it clear that a relationship with God isn't about testing or manipulation. He refuses to seek validation through a big public display.

And then comes the final offer. The big one. The ultimate shortcut.

The devil basically offers him the prize he came for. All the kingdoms of the world, but without the pain, without the suffering, without the cross. All he has to do is change his allegiance.

It's the offer of a political kingdom served up on a silver platter right then and there. And for the third and final time, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy, trying a hard line in the sand. His loyalty is to God and God alone.

He completely rejects any kingdom that's built on a compromised foundation. He chooses his father's way, even knowing that path reads straight to a cross. So let's just pause and break this down.

The core conflict couldn't be clearer, right? On one side, you've got the devil's models of power. Be a magician who serves himself, a showman who manipulates God, or a revolutionary who seizes political control. And on the other side, Jesus consistently chooses a radically different way.

A way defined by total trust in his father, a refusal to play games with God, and an absolute singular allegiance to him. So after acing this incredible test and defining exactly what kind of king he would be, Jesus is ready. He steps out onto the public stage, not with a quiet suggestion, but with an urgent, clear, world-changing announcement.

This one sentence becomes his headline. It's the central theme of pretty much everything he's about to teach. It's a call to completely reorient your life, your thinking, your allegiances, your actions, because something powerful and new is breaking into the world right now.

Now this is so important for us to get. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven, he doesn't mean a place you go when you die. He's talking about God's active rule, his authority, his reign, invading human history, right here on earth.

And this brings up this really fascinating tension that you see all through the New Testament. This idea of the already-not-yet. The king has arrived, so the kingdom has already started.

But it's not yet here in its final, perfect, complete form. The Holy Spirit is described as the Arhapan, which is like a down payment, a first installment. It's a guarantee, a little taste of the future glory that's still to come.

So how does this world-altering reign actually kick off? Does it start with armies and political campaigns? Not a chance. It begins in the most unexpected, counterintuitive way you could possibly imagine. With a simple invitation.

The start of this kingdom is just... It's unlike anything else. He doesn't go to the religious scholars or the powerful elite. He goes down to the docks and calls regular fishermen.

And then he asks them to do something crazy. Leave their family businesses, their entire livelihood, and just follow him. It's radical.

He then shows his authority not by force, but by what he teaches and by healing people. And pretty soon, huge crowds are flocking to him. But, and this is a huge but, we get this really sobering warning.

Popularity is a tricky thing. The same crowds that are mesmerized by him in Galilee will, in time, become the very same crowds in Jerusalem screaming for his death. His kingdom, it turns out, is not going to be built on public opinion.

And that leaves us with this one last, powerful question to chew on. This kingdom begins with a call so compelling that ordinary, working guys will literally drop their nets, walk away from their families and their entire future, just to be a part of it. What does that tell you about how incredibly valuable this kingdom truly is?