

Unit 20

Jesus Begins His Ministry

Gospels

Memory Verses

“And Jesus answered them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’”

—LUKE 5:31-32

Jesus Is Baptized

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus was baptized by John, not as a sign of repentance like the people but to fulfill all righteousness and show that He fully obeyed the Father.

BACKGROUND PASSAGES: Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22

You're likely familiar with all the work you put into getting your house ready to receive a guest. Whether friends or family, you probably clean differently, or at least out of your normal routine, in order to make sure things are ready at the right time.



How does knowledge that a guest is coming to your house change things in your daily routine?

John the Baptist, last seen as an infant in the Gospel of Luke, grew up and became spiritually strong while awaiting the day for his public appearance to Israel (Luke 1:80). When he did become known, he told people that a king was coming—indeed, *the* King, the Messiah. It was time to prepare! But this King isn't concerned with external preparation. To prepare for Him, people must start with repentance of the heart—we need a change of mind that leads to a change in behavior.

Group Time

Point 1: The Son's herald calls for repentance and baptism (Matt. 3:1-6).

¹ In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Repentance is changing one’s way of life as a result of a dramatic change in thought. But this raises the question “Change our thoughts about what?” We need to change how we view the kingdom of heaven, change how we see our sin, and change how we see God. To *repent* involves a posture willing to change our perspective to align with that of the coming King. John fulfilled his purpose to prepare the way for the King by shining a light on the issue of sin so people would repent and be ready to receive the Savior.

Repentance is a _____ to God’s gracious call to salvation.

It includes a genuine _____ for one’s sin, a turning away from one’s sin toward _____, and a life that reflects lasting _____ and transformation.

Once we see our sin clearly, we are at a crossroads. We could continue on in our sin. But if our hearts are postured toward Christ, then the next step is **confession**, like those confessing their sins as they were being baptized in the Jordan River. Before we can move on to “do” anything about the sins we now see, we must have the courage, humility, and willingness to confess them, then the fruit of changed behavior can come.



Why is confession of sin a vital step on the path to changed behavior?

Point 2: The Son's herald calls for the fruit of repentance (Matt. 3:7-12).

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

⁸ Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Repentance is a change in how we think about God, sin, and ourselves, which inherently leads to a confession of our sin. When one's heart is truly changed and aligned with God's righteousness, confession leads us toward “fruit in keeping with repentance,” which grows out of a transformed life. The fruit of repentance demonstrates a genuinely changed heart by virtue of a new identity.



What are some examples of “fruit in keeping with repentance”?

Baptism is all about identification. John baptized people into a culture of repentance, but he also recognized his limitations. He boldly told the people who came to him, and particularly the religious leaders, that there was no inherent value in being identified with Abraham or even with himself. The identity that matters comes with the Messiah, who will baptize with the very Spirit of God. Only an encounter with the person and work of Jesus Christ can bring true life-change.

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 _____, symbolizing the believer's _____ in a crucified, buried, and risen _____, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

Point 3: The Son's herald baptizes Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17).

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

At the baptism of Jesus, we see a complete confirmation of His messianic identity. John the Baptist, the first prophet in Israel in more than four hundred years, confirmed that Jesus is the Messiah by admitting his need to be baptized by Jesus. Then after He was baptized by John, Jesus saw the Holy Spirit of God descending like a dove upon Him, confirming that He is the Messiah, the "Anointed One." And finally, the audible voice of God the Father declared that Jesus is, in fact, God's Son, the Messiah.



What are some ways one's identity as a believer in Jesus should impact thoughts, actions, and life choices?

Not only did God break His four hundred years of silence, He specifically announced Jesus as His Son, the Messiah. God broke His silence with the language of family. And the same Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who confirmed the identity of Jesus at His baptism are the same Persons who confirm and affirm our identity as adopted children of God once we come to faith in Christ (see Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:4-5,13-14).

Voices from the Church

"We need the gospel. We need it more than books. More than studies. More than groups. We need the life-giving, identity-establishing, purpose-defining gospel of Jesus Christ."¹

—Eric Mason

How do you typically think and feel about your identity?



The Worst of Sinners

Righteous in Christ

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Matthew 3:1-6

When Isaiah prophesied that there would be a “voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,’” he was using instructions that people in his day were familiar with. When a king came to town, you cleared the path. This was how you prepared for the arrival of the king. And yet, Jesus did not come to conquer in the way earthly kings conquer. And when John the Baptist made his declaration, his command was to “Repent!”

In this new kingdom with a new kind of king, what kind of preparation is required? It is not a physical clearing of a path to make way for Him to ride through the town. It is a preparation of the heart, of repenting from sin that might hinder our closeness with God. In this way, repentance is like making straight paths for the Lord in our hearts as we throw aside any sin that might hinder us or entangle us.



What would it look like for you to prepare your heart for the Lord today?

Day 2: Read Matthew 3:7-12

Sometimes when we read a verse like verse 10 that says that trees without good fruit will be cut down, we can kind of freak out. We might find ourselves falling into a trap of performance, where we think that we have to work really hard to produce good fruit. (In these verses, Jesus is specifically talking to the religious leaders. But He says something similar to all of His disciples in John 15.) In response to this, we try really hard to be loving, joyful, patient, and kind. But truthfully, that kind of legalism and performance doesn't produce fruit.

This is where we must remember that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the fruit of the Spirit, not disciplines of the flesh. We do not discipline our way into being more patient. We do not discipline our way into being more loving. Spiritual fruit comes from abiding in Christ, from staying close to Him. To produce good fruit, our focus must be on Christ, not the fruit. The Holy Spirit will produce the fruit; it is our job to abide in Christ.



How do you need to change your focus to make abiding in Christ your primary goal (instead of many of the other good things that often take Christ's place)?

Day 3: Read Matthew 3:13-17

I don't think we can underestimate the importance of how God chose to identify Jesus when He spoke at His baptism. God could have chosen from any number of descriptors or names to call Jesus, but He chose "my beloved Son." And God refers to us in a similar way. Throughout the rest of the New Testament we see over and over again how God adopts us as His children, how in Christ we are no longer slaves but rather adopted as dearly loved children with all the blessings and inheritance that go with that new position. God is not quiet about His love for us and His design that we be a family.

And yet, how easy is it for us to forget that we are His children, loved for who we are and not what we do? We so easily think that if we don't spend enough time in God's Word and prayer, then God won't love us as much. Or we forget that we are a family, and so, we don't prioritize our relationships with other believers. At our church, we always say that the church is not like a family, it *is* a family.



What part of your identity as God's child and a member of God's family is hardest for you to believe and live out?

Day 4: Read Romans 6:1-11

Understanding how baptism is tied to our identity is critical to understand these verses. Paul is asking the question, “If you are in Christ and have been adopted into His family and are being made like Him, then don’t you realize that means you died to sin just like He did?”

Repentance is not just a one-time thing we do when we come to Christ. It is a characteristic that believers embody at all times in their walk with Christ. Why? Because when we identified with Christ, we died to sin. Being in Christ means that we don’t live in sin. We don’t walk in darkness. We live in righteousness. We live in the light. And when we sin, we repent, confess, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform us.



In what areas of your life might you need to repent in order to live fully out of your identity as one who has died to sin in Christ?

Day 5: Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Running away from sin because it’s “bad” will never be enough motivation to keep anyone out of darkness. We need a clear vision of our identity, clarity on the gifts we receive in Christ, and a full experience of a loving relationship with God. We need to know the hope of what He has called us to and see the wealth of the glorious inheritance He has promised us. We need to experience the immeasurable greatness of His power and His strength.

These things are what best motivate us and empower us to live out of our true identity. Being in Christ is not about receiving a list of do’s and don’ts. Too often we have limited it to that. But my prayer is that God would open the eyes of our hearts to see and receive everything Paul prays in these verses so that we would know who we are in Christ and have freedom to live out of our true identity as children of God.



In what ways is your identity in God’s family different than the one you experience with your earthly family? In what ways is it similar?

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Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

With this volume of *The Gospel Project*, the storyline of the Bible shifts from the Old Testament to the New, and we enter the era in which God begins to fulfill His promise of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the sessions that follow, you'll take a closer look at the context surrounding the birth of Jesus, the theological parallels between Adam and Jesus (the last Adam), as well as the early ministry of Jesus.

Some of these stories will be familiar to you and the rest of your group—the Christmas story, for example, or the story of Jesus' temptation. In the familiar stories, we want to help you see aspects of the Gospel accounts that you may have overlooked. In the less familiar stories, we want to help you see the beauty of Jesus' interaction with all kinds of people with all kinds of needs and all kinds of backgrounds.

Our hope as you study the Scriptures is that you will be drawn to worship Jesus as the Savior and Lord who fulfills God's original intention for us as His people. Here we see a Jesus withstanding temptation, calling disciples, loving the unlovable, and battling the evil one. May your worship of this Savior lead you to faithful obedience to His call in extending grace and mercy and the message of salvation to those around you.

UNIT 19

SESSION 1

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2. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1992), 376.
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SESSION 2

1. Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2018), 40-41.
2. Jen Wilkin, *In His Image* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 107.

SESSION 3

1. John Piper, "God Is Always Doing 10,000 Things in Your Life," *Desiring God*, January 1, 2013, www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life.
2. Martin Luther, *The Magnificat*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].
3. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 690.

SESSION 4

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 168.
2. Thomas Becon, *The Sermon of Simeon in the Temple*, quoted in *Luke*, ed. Beth Kreitzer, vol. 3 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 5

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UNIT 20

SESSION 1

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2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (SCM Press, 2015), 91.

EASTER SESSION

1. Basil, *On Humility* 20, quoted in 1-2 *Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VII in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 75.

SESSION 2

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2. Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 9.

SESSION 3

1. Trip Lee, *Rise: Get Up and Live in God's Great Story* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2015), 47.
2. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance* 1.12.53, quoted in *John 1-10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, vol. IVa in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 4

1. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 14.44, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Jerry Bridges, *31 Days Toward Trusting God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2013) [eBook].

UNIT 21

SESSION 1

1. Fred L. Horton Jr., "Exorcism," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003), 533.
2. Dexter Maben, "Mark," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1290.
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SESSION 2

1. See *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 89.
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3. Kim Cash Tate, "Rejected by Friends, Loved by Jesus," *Desiring God*, December 29, 2015, www.desiringgod.org/articles/rejected-by-friends-loved-by-jesus.

SESSION 3

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2. Andrew Murray, *Humility, in Humility and Absolute Surrender* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 42.
3. "John," in *Africa Study Bible* (Oasis International LTD, 2016), 1534.

SESSION 4

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