

October 22

Matthew 3, 4; Luke 3; John 1

Hi this is Klint Bitter with your Project 4:4 daily accelerator for October 22nd.

Today our reading is pretty short and smattered across three of the Gospels. What's great about each of the Gospels is that you can pick up on the uniqueness with which the authors see the life and ministry of Jesus. One of those tidbits – if you haven't caught it already – is in the beginning of today's passage from Luke chapter 3.

You notice that Luke is very specific about the date. Dating a specific time period or writing by naming the year of the current ruler was common practice at the time. As we read through this harmonized collection of the Gospel accounts, you'll notice that Luke is a pretty specific guy. He was a doctor and had a mind for the specificity. His Gospel account is very detailed, as is Acts. He really assumes the role of historian for the early church and does so very well.

That being said, let's get to some of the content we run across today. We encounter, full on, this mysterious guy John the Baptist. Now, the first thing I think of is college. At my Nazarene Bible School, I was the only kid in my ministry classes at the time who grew up with a Baptist background. I had one professor that jokingly reminded me, "Remember, Klint. John was a Baptist but Jesus...he was a Nazarene."

It was all in good fun, because as we see in today's reading, John's role in priming the people to receive the ministry of Jesus Christ is significant. In those times, if a king was going to visit the farthest reaches of his empire, he would send a herald in front of him. The herald would warn the people that the king was coming and the people would repair the roads for the king's smooth travel and make other provisions. Pastor John Soper puts it this way, "John is Jesus' herald, telling people that the king is coming and calling them to repair not the roads, but their own hearts."

We have to remember that John is really like the last of the Old Testament prophets. When Luke records that, "the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert..." This is a BIG deal. It's been 400 years since the Israelites had heard from God. The King is coming, and John is making the path level, clear for the King's arrival.

John was not one to mince words. His preaching wasn't soft, feel good, rejoice. It was hard: repent and be baptized. We read today that he even calls his hearers a brood of vipers and warns about the coming judgment.

John was, indeed a baptizer. Baptism would have been a radical idea to the Jewish people of the time. Baptism, at that time, was practiced by people from outside of the Jewish faith who wished to become Jewish converts. They would be baptized

as symbol signifying their sins being washed away, their devotion and public adjoining with the Jewish faith.

People of Jewish heritage, however, believed that their racial pedigree and observance of ceremonial law was enough to make them clean. John establishes a new precedent – and it's a big one. Here again we see that this Kingdom Jesus is about to usher in is a NEW kingdom. One in which all people, from any background can enter. We've all heard, "the ground is level at the foot of the cross." It's a reminder that before the Glory of God, we all fall short. So, the Jewish people were about to find that while they are God's chosen nation, they are chosen for God's blessing to be poured out on every nation...not merely their own.

People were responsive to this strange, wilderness man's message. I like to envision him as Bear Grylls with a camel hair jacket. But, the calling of God was evident on his life and, that his message was from God became evident in the way people followed him. Again I emphasize, all the while, John knows he's preparing the way for the one to come.

Continuing in our reading, we come to the baptism of Jesus. I'm a little ashamed to admit that, before preparing for this accelerator, I had never really paused to consider *why* Jesus was baptized. Certainly, it couldn't have been for the same reason that his followers would be baptized. Here's where I landed: Jesus didn't need to repent of anything; he was baptized because he was fully identifying with his people and their sins. These are both signals that indicate the start of Jesus' public ministry.

Notice that in Jesus' baptism, we have the full Trinity present; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's unusual. Also unusual is the voice of God. Scripture doesn't clearly say, but I wonder if this voice was audible to John and others who were present. Again, imagine the significance of that moment, as people hadn't heard from God for 400 years. Whether other's heard the voice of God as Jesus did or not, John did, in fact, see the Spirit of God descend.

The last thing I want to draw attention to today is the temptation of Jesus. You've probably heard a handful of great sermons on this if you've been following Christ for very long. Here are the things that jump out at me as I read over this account this time around.

One: The timing of this attack of the enemy is impeccable. It comes after the high point of Jesus's baptism. I'm reminded to be especially aware of the enemy's ploys after those spiritual mountain tops. Not only that, Jesus was embarking on his mission. Just know, when you're at the high and on mission with God, be aware of the temptations the enemy will throw your way.

Next: I'm reminded that temptation is not sin. Scripture reminds us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. Recently, I was talking with a friend struggling with a particular temptation. He explained what I've often felt

myself: guilt and frustration at the temptations faced. In those moments, I remember this interaction between Jesus and Satan. There's a difference between being tempted to sin and giving in to that sin. Certainly, sin is not so easily defined as action. Inaction can be sin; un-checked thoughts can certainly be sinful. But being tempted to sin is not sinful. And truthfully, guilt can be a powerful tool in the hands of the enemy to wreak havoc in the life of the believer. So let me encourage you today to see that temptation remains in its rightful place.

Finally, I'll close with this thought: Jesus responds to temptation each time in going to Scripture. It's an encouragement to you and I to let God's word dwell richly in our hearts to combat the works of the enemy and the temptations of the flesh. The verse which inspired the title "project 4:4" is read here and is appropriate to this point: "man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." In these words – the Word – is life.

I'll be back tomorrow with more Project 4:4. Until then, this is Klint Bitter. May you never live on bread alone.