

Monday Week 31 The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Bible Reading: Mark 1:6-11

Q. 121 How was the Trinity involved in the introduction of Jesus' ministry?

A. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus the Son, and the Father spoke from heaven.

A hunter was in the woods watching for deer. He was standing very still. A small bird flew to a branch that was right beside him. The hunter could clearly see the feathers, the beak and the eyes of the bird. The hunter didn't move. The bird flew all around him. It is not often that birds come close to people. The hunter felt special that a wild creature would come so close to him.

When John baptized Jesus something special happened. The Holy Spirit came down from heaven. The Bible says that the Spirit came on Jesus like a dove. Just then there was a voice from heaven that said, "This is my beloved Son." The voice came from the Father in heaven. Three persons of the One God were revealed – God the Father spoke, Jesus the Son was baptized, and the Holy Spirit came like a dove. Three Persons in One God is called the Trinity.

Thinking Deeper

Various cults deny the Trinity. Most often their denial focuses on Jesus. They don't believe that Jesus who came in the flesh is the pre-existent and only Son of God who, after he died and rose again, ascended back to heaven from where he had come. In almost every case where the Trinity is denied, Jesus is diminished. When Jesus is diminished, man is increased. So cults will either deify man or assert that man can somehow do something to save himself. If they deify man (as Mormons do) then Jesus is diminished in that man will eventually be on the same level as Jesus. If they say that man can save himself by some kind of effort, then the need for the cross disappears.

The cults which deny the Trinity end up exalting man and diminishing Jesus. But the Bible says that Jesus "must increase" and that in all things he "must have the pre-eminence." Historic Christianity has maintained the doctrine of the Trinity because it keeps Jesus in the exalted place that the Father has given him. In that great truth tradition, we affirm with Reginald Heber that God is "Holy, holy, holy...God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

Tuesday Week 31 The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Bible Reading: Mark 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1-11

Q 122 What happened to Jesus just before he began his ministry?

A. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days and tempted by the devil.

A man did not eat any food for ten days. He was fasting. To fast means to not eat anything. This man was so hungry that when he saw some cows in a field eating grass he thought, "That grass looks good!" He said to himself, "why am I thinking about grass? I can eat some real food." He decided to stop fasting and began to eat again. Food sure tasted good to him.

Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days. He had been fasting and talking with his Father in heaven. The devil came to Jesus when he was hungry. He tried to get Jesus to turn stones into bread. He tempted Jesus. That means he tried to get Jesus to do something wrong. It was not wrong for Jesus to eat bread, but it was wrong for Jesus to listen to the devil. Jesus said, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Jesus would not do anything unless God told him to do it. God didn't tell Jesus to turn stones into bread. After the devil left Jesus, God sent angels with food for Jesus.

Jesus didn't yield to temptation. He used words from the Bible to answer the devil. Jesus gave us an example to follow when we are tempted. We can use God's word to answer temptation.

Thinking Deeper

Why was it wrong for Jesus to turn stones into bread? Years before this, when he was twelve, Jesus had said to Mary and Joseph, "I must be about my Father's business." It was of the Father that Jesus was directed to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. It was according to the will of the Father that Jesus was tempted by the devil. When Jesus answered Satan's temptation to turn stones to bread, he knew exactly what he was doing. He was reconfirming that he was on earth for one purpose—to do what the Father said. He was to act only by the words that came "out of the mouth of God." Jesus was an example of Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Jesus only did miracles at the will of the Father in heaven. Had he acted on the suggestion from Satan to turn stones into bread, he would have violated his purpose on earth. At the end of his ministry Jesus had a similar temptation when King Herod asked him to do a miracle. Jesus did nothing. He was committed to his Father's will and his Father's will only.

Here is a great lesson for the Christian. We are to do only what the Father tells us. Listening to the suggestions of other voices opens us up to great trouble. Adam and Eve, for example, listened to the wrong voice. The world is still groaning.

Wednesday Week 31 The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Bible Reading: Mark 1:14,15

Q. 123 How did Jesus begin his ministry?

A. Jesus proclaimed that the time had come for the gospel.

Six year old Victor was excited to go to school. It was the first day of First Grade. He made sure he was ready. When the bus came, he was on time. That evening when he came home his mother noticed that he was upset. "What's the matter, Victor?" she asked.

"I think they put me in Kindergarten," he answered through tears. "I didn't learn anything all day!"

His mother told him that there was no mistake and that he would soon be learning. Victor was ready to begin. He knew that First Grade was the time for learning.

When Jesus was thirty years old, he knew it was time for telling people about the gospel. The word "gospel" means good news. The good news Jesus talked about is that people can be forgiven for their sins and have eternal life in heaven. In only three years Jesus would go to the cross and die for the sins of the world. Jesus began telling people the good news.

Here is the gospel in one Bible verse: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

Thinking Deeper

Jesus came with good news. He also proclaimed that people should repent. In proclaiming the gospel, he was inaugurating the dispensation of grace. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation" was appearing to all men. At the same time Jesus was continuing the message of truth that had been proclaimed in the Old Testament by the prophets and then by John the Baptist. All men have sinned and must repent. Jesus continued in that prophetic tradition while he began his ministry which would fulfill the good news. He would die as God's sin offering for all mankind. All of the types in the scriptures would soon be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The concept of individual rights guaranteed by the U. S. Constitution has been called "the great American experiment." Ronald Reagan called America "a shining city on a hill." Although American freedom is exceptional in our world, it came into being on the foundation of other earlier documents. Notable among them was the Magna Charta, an English document signed in 1215 A.D. which guaranteed the rights of freemen in England. So American Constitutional government is in a real sense a continuation of guaranteed freedoms from years past. The gospel is similar, in that although it is exceptional, it is a continuation of the message that had already been given by the ancient prophets. In every sense, Jesus fulfilled their message.

Thursday Week 31 The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Bible Reading: John 1:43-52

Q. 124 How did Jesus assemble his disciples?

A. Jesus called people to follow him.

A hunter scared a flock of turkeys. The turkeys flew in all directions. Instead of leaving the woods, the hunter sat down quietly and waited. After several minutes he could hear some turkeys calling to one another. They wanted to get back together. The hunter knew that they would likely come back. In God's animal kingdom, the creatures have ways to call one another together. Mother hens have a special cluck that causes her little chicks to run to her. When a covey of quail is scattered, they will whistle to each other and soon be back together.

Jesus called certain men to follow him. He wanted to teach people how to live to please God. He also wanted to show them how to have faith in God and not in themselves. He chose twelve disciples who would learn God's ways and then be able to teach God's ways to other people. Jesus gave a special call to the men he chose. "Follow me," he said. His disciples came together and followed him.

Thinking Deeper

Jesus had an ongoing ministry with multitudes of people. He healed them and taught them. But when Jesus invested time and energy in building his ways into people, he spent time with a few. He had his twelve disciples, a few women who followed him, and about one hundred others who were serious followers. (This number is derived from the number in the upper room at Pentecost.) The ones Jesus spent most of his time with were Peter, James and John. If you consider who made the most lasting influence of all these, it was these three. They are the ones who had the most to do with the early church in Jerusalem and the beginnings of the Christian evangelism formation. (Paul came a bit later.)

The point here is that when Jesus wanted to make a lasting impact, he worked with a few. The pattern may be worth considering. Should we try to engage a lot of people? Yes, Jesus did. But that's not how he built his church. To do that, he focused on twelve (and particularly three) men who really learned and were committed to "the Jesus way." If we would make a lasting impact, it is probably better to thoroughly train a few, than to exhaust ourselves with a host of people but have no real disciples. Look for people who are committed to "the Jesus way" of living, and make them disciples.

Friday Week 31 The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

Review the week's questions.

- Q. 121 How was the Trinity involved in the introduction of Jesus' ministry?
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- Q. 122 What happened to Jesus just before he began his ministry?
A. Jesus was in the wilderness forty days and tempted by the devil.
- Q. 123 How did Jesus begin his ministry?
A. Jesus proclaimed that the time had come for the gospel.
- Q. 124 How did Jesus assemble his disciples?
A. Jesus called people to follow him.

Before an airplane flies, the pilot is to make sure everything works. He walks around the plane to make sure nothing is wrong with it. He checks the wings. He checks the tail section. He checks the fuel. Then he gets into the airplane. He makes sure the engine works. He checks to make sure the controls work. After he has done all that, then he can begin his taxi to the end of the runway where he can take off. Each time before he flies the plane the pilot must check his aircraft to make sure it is safe and ready to fly.

Before Jesus began his ministry, certain things needed to be in place. He had to be introduced as the Messiah. That happened when he was baptized. He had to be prepared by his time in the wilderness and his temptation. Then it was time for Jesus to begin. He told people that the time of good news had come. Jesus was ready to begin his ministry.

Thinking Deeper

Christian apologist John Warwick Montgomery wrote a book with the title Faith Founded On Fact. He argues that the Christian faith is not merely a "pie in the sky" kind of belief, but is a belief rooted in historic happenings, many of which are fulfillments of former prophecies. Jesus came to minister to people and to go to the cross to redeem all of mankind. His mission was well established before he ever came.

Throughout the Old Testament the prophets proclaimed that the messiah would come to minister grace to the hurting masses while he lived, and to the sin of mankind in his death. If Hebrew seekers had open hearts, they understood who Jesus was when he appeared. John the Baptist proclaimed him and disciples followed him. Jesus walked in steps that had already been prophesied. From his birth to his baptism, the way had been laid out. God was not doing things to surprise men. He was working to bring his salvation to all men. Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah. His person and work had been clearly announced, and everything was in place that the prophets had spoken of. Jesus began his ministry "in the fullness of time."