

# Harmony Of The Gospels -- Lesson #6

## The Beginning Of Christ's Public Ministry

*Matthew 3:13-4:12; Mark 1:9-14; Luke 3:19-4:14; John 1:19-4:45*

### I. ***Jesus Is Baptized By John In The Jordan***

- A. Tradition fixes the ford of Jordan east of Jericho as the place where Jesus was baptized. It is the same section of the river which opened for the passage of Israel under Joshua, and later for Elijah and Elisha. This ford is seventy or eighty miles from Nazareth.
- B. Jesus intended to be baptized before ever hearing John. His righteousness was not the result of human persuasion.
- C. It seemed to John too great an honor for him to baptize Jesus, and too great a humiliation for Jesus to be baptized.
- D. Jesus came not only to fulfill all the requirements of the law, but also all that wider range of righteousness of which the law was only a part.
  - 1. John's baptism was a commandment of God. Had Jesus neglected or refused to obey this command He would have lacked a portion of righteousness, and the Pharisees would have readily exploited it.
  - 2. It was the divinely appointed method by which the Messiahship of Jesus was to be revealed to John (John 1:33-34).
- E. The point of the Spirit's visible appearance was to point Jesus out, not to Himself, but to others; and to point Him out as the person concerning whom the voice from heaven was uttered.
- F. The heavens opened at the beginning of Jesus' ministry to honor Him and at the end of it to receive Him. Christ is the opener of heaven for all men. All four gospel writers are careful to inform us that it was not an actual dove. The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus was in accordance with prophecy (Isaiah 11:2; 61:1).
- G. At His baptism Jesus was honored by the attestation of both the Spirit and the Father. The Father Himself states that relationship of which the apostle John so often spoke (John 1:1). Adam was made (Genesis 1:26), but Jesus was begotten (Psalm 2:7). Both were sons of God, but in far different senses.

### II. ***The Temptation Of Jesus***

- A. Just after His baptism, Jesus is rushed into the suffering of temptation. He was brought into temptation, but did not seek it. He was led of God into temptation, but was not tempted of God. Sinlessness does not preclude temptation, for Adam could not have been tempted, nor could Satan have fallen.

- B. A forty days' fast was accomplished by Moses (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:18), and by Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), and it is significant that in this connection that these two men appeared with Christ at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). Matthew 4:2 is the first time it is mentioned that our Lord shared our physical needs.
- C. The first temptation involved distrust and curiosity, and appealed to the present appetites and the impulse of the moment. Jesus answered by stating that one must satisfy their duty to God before appeasing the pangs of hunger (John 4:32-34; Job 23:12; Jeremiah 15:16).
- D. The second temptation involved over-trust and presumption. Jesus responded by stating that one should not tempt God. Had Jesus cast Himself down, He would have demanded of the Father a needless miracle to prove His Sonship and would have put the love of God to an unnecessary trial.
- E. The third temptation involved the attaining of the kingdoms of men by physical rather than spiritual power, and bypassing the path of suffering. Jesus' response showed a passionate indignation. This last temptation was the most disgusting, for its sin was grossly apparent. By serving God, Jesus obtained all the earthly authority which the devil offered Him, along with heavenly authority.
- F. Angels do not appear again visibly ministering to Jesus until Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). God had indeed given His angels charge, and they came to Him who refused to put the Father to the test. But they did not assist Him during His temptation, for He must resist that alone.

### **III. *The Testimony Of John To The Sanhedrin***

- A. The term "Jews" is used seventy times by John to describe the ruling classes of Judea. They looked upon John as a priest and Judean, but upon Jesus as a carpenter and Galilean. It is probable that the sending of these men marks the period when the feelings of the rulers toward John changed from friendliness to hostility.
- B. John firmly declined to take honors which did not belong to him. The Jews interpreted the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 literally and looked for the return of Elijah who was translated (cf. Matthew 17:10). Moses had foretold a prophet who should come (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), but the Jews appeared to have no fixed opinion concerning Him.
- C. In John's answer, he shows himself to be the spiritual Elijah, for he declared that he came to do the work of Elijah; that is, to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah.
- D. The words "standeth" and "shoe" showed that the person of whom the Baptist spoke had a visible, bodily form. The greatest prophet felt unworthy to render to Christ the most humble service. However, uncon-

verted sinners often presume to serve Christ according to their own will, and fully expect to have their service honored and rewarded.

#### IV. ***John's Identification Of Jesus As The Messiah***

- A. Jesus had just returned from the temptation in the wilderness. This is His first appearance in John's gospel. Lambs were commonly used for sin offerings, and three of them were sacrificed in the cleansing of a leper (Leviticus 4:32; 14:10). Isaiah depicts Christ as a lamb (Isaiah 53:1-12). However, the Jews could not understand his meaning because they could not conceive of the sacrifice of a person.
- B. The present tense, "taketh," is used because of the atoning effect of Christ's sacrifice is perpetual, and the fountain of His forgiveness never fails. The Baptist had baptized for the remission of sins. He now points his converts to Him who would make this promise good.
- C. As a man John was six months older than Jesus, but Jesus was the eternal Word. John asserts the preexistence of our Lord. The descent of the Spirit enabled John to identify the Messiah and it was, so to speak, an official recognition of Jesus as Messiah, similar to the anointing or crowning of a king.
- D. The climax of John's testimony was twofold, embracing the senses of sight and hearing. He saw the dove-like apparition of the Spirit and he heard the voice of the Father, which convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God. He not only prepared the people to receive Christ by calling them to repentance and baptizing them for the remission of sins, but he also corrected four notable errors concerning Christ at the time:
  - 1. The Jews looked for a Messiah of no greater spiritual worthiness than John himself.
  - 2. The Jews looked for one who would come after Moses, David and the prophets and neglected the fact that He would be before them, both in point of time and in honor.
  - 3. The Jews looked for a liberator from earthly bondage -- a glorious king.
  - 4. The Jews looked for a human Messiah, a son of David.

#### V. ***Jesus Makes His First Disciples***

- A. The two disciples mentioned in John 1:37 were Andrew and probably John who wrote the gospel. Before Andrew did anything else, he found his brother. In finding Christ, Andrew had made the greatest discovery which is possible for a man to make.
- B. "Cephas" is Hebrew, "Peter" is Greek and "stone" is English. It means a mass of rock detached from the strata on which the earth rests. The future tense, "thou shalt be," indicates the stability to which the then weak and vacillating Simon would attain.

- C. Nathanael is commonly identified with Bartholomew. The whole law is full of symbolism which refers to Christ (cf. Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17-19; Deuteronomy 18:15; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 53:1-12; Ezekiel 34:23-31).
- D. The Galileans were not very highly esteemed because of their lack of culture, their crude dialect and their contact with Gentiles. Nathanael was an Israelite in spirit as well as in the flesh (Romans 2:28-29; 9:16). The superhuman knowledge Jesus had of him wrought faith in Nathanael, as it did afterward in the woman of Samaria. However, Nathanael was destined to see greater miracles.
- E. John 1:49 is the first recorded uninspired confession of the divinity of Jesus. The expression "King of Israel" probably expressed the hope which Nathanael then entertained that Jesus would restore the kingdom of David (Acts 1:6).
- F. Jesus calls Himself "Son of man" almost 80 times in all four gospels. He has been referred to by several titles in John 1, but Jesus introduces this one to His disciples which refers to His humanity.

#### VI. ***Jesus Works His First Miracle***

- A. The days enumerated in John's first two chapters constitute a week. In Palestine the marriage ceremony usually began at twilight. The feast after the marriage was at the home of the bridegroom, and was sometimes prolonged for several days (Genesis 29:27; Judges 14:12); but in this case it seems likely that poverty limited the wedding feast to one day.
- B. John never called our Lord's mother by her name. He assumes that she is known to his readers. This is one of the many points tending to show the supplemental character of John's gospel.
- C. John 2:2 is the earliest use of the term "disciples" in the ministry of Jesus. His disciples were Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael and probably James and John. The interest which Mary took in the feast suggests that she was a close friend of the bridegroom's family.
- D. Our Lord's answer indicates that Mary's request had in it more than a desire for the gift of wine. What she mainly wanted was to have Jesus manifest Himself as Messiah. However, that time had not yet come.
- E. The statement, "they filled them up to the brim," emphasizes the great quantity and it shows that there was no room to add anything whatsoever to the contents of the jars. As to the quantity, it was between 106 and 162 gallons.
- F. This was the beginning or the first of all His miracles, and John's statement condemns the false Catholic traditions which tell of miracles performed by Christ in His childhood. The value of the miracle was in what it signified, not in what it wrought. It manifested the glory of

Christ, part of which glory is His power to change the worse into the better, the simpler into the richer.

#### **VII. *Jesus Makes His First Sojourn At Capernaum***

- A. Jesus is said to have gone "down" because Cana is among the hills and Capernaum was by the Lake of Galilee, about six hundred feet below sea level.
- B. Our Lord's brethren are mentioned nine times in the New Testament (Matthew 12:46; 13:55; Mark 3:32; 6:3; Luke 8:19-20; John 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19). Six of the references speak of His brethren in connection with His mother, and strongly indicate that Jesus was the first born son of Mary, and that she had at least four other sons, besides daughters.
- C. They did not remain there long because the passover was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

#### **VIII. *The First Cleansing Of The Temple At The Passover***

- A. The markets described in this text were located in the outer court or the Gentile's court. It was set up this way for the convenience of the people, and the nearness of the passover increased its size.
- B. Jesus drove the animals and the moneychangers out of the court. Jesus based His peculiar authority over the temple on His peculiar relationship to Him for whom the temple was built. As a Son, He purged the temple of His Father.
- C. The rebuke of Jesus was addressed to the priests, for the market belonged to them and the moneychangers were their agents. When He purged the temple three years later, He branded the traders as robbers (Matthew 21:13).
- D. The Jews believed that only a divinely commissioned person could interfere with the ordering of God's house. They therefore asked Jesus to give them a sign as evidence that He possessed a divine commission. The manner in which He had cleansed the house was of itself a sign, if they only had eyes to see it.
- E. Jesus' statement about the temple was twisted into a charge against Him (Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58). The sanctuary was a figure or symbol of the body of Christ, and the words of Jesus were a covert prediction that as they were desecrating the symbol so would they destroy His body.
- F. The second temple, built by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (520 B.C.), had been torn down and built by Herod the Great. The whole temple complex was not completed until A.D. 64.

- G. It would be three years before they understood the saying of Jesus. They believed that Jesus had meant to predict that the Jews would kill Him, and that He would rise again on the third day.
- H. The word translated "trust" is the same one translated "believe" in the preceding verse. They trusted Him, but He did not trust them, for He knew them. He did not tell them anything of His plans and purposes, and the conversation with Nicodemus is a sample of this reticence.

#### IX. ***The Interview Of Nicodemus With Jesus***

- A. Nicodemus is mentioned only by John. He was a ruler or a member of the Sanhedrin. Although Nicodemus may have come to Jesus by night to avoid the hostility of his colleagues, he was the only member of the Sanhedrin to hear Jesus.
- B. The rulers knew that Jesus was not the product of any of the rabbinical schools, and His miracles marked Him as a prophet and distinguished Him from all who were guided merely by reason, no matter how learned. The miracles of Jesus proved that He was from God (Acts 10:38).
- C. Knowing that a man cannot be literally born a second time, Nicodemus states to Jesus the literal import of His words. He saw himself barred forever from the kingdom by an impossible requirement.
- D. Jesus drew a distinction between fleshly birth and spiritual birth. He did this to prepare Nicodemus to understand that it is the spirit and not the flesh which undergoes the change called the new birth. The learned are sometimes remarkably unacquainted with truth (cf. Matthew 15:14).
- E. Christ told Nicodemus that He alone can teach concerning heavenly matters. He can do this because He did not begin on earth and ascend to heaven. Jesus spoke of Himself as being present in heaven.
- F. The lesson of the brazen serpent will be found in its main points of resemblance to the crucifixion of Christ. The next verse teaches of the magnitude, reach, impartiality, richness and the limitations of God's love. Love is the mutual and binding grace between God and man. Christ's first mission to the world was for salvation rather than for judgment. His second mission will be for judgment.
- G. Belief in the dual nature of Jesus is essential to salvation. Unbelief is the world's crowning sin. The believer is saved now (Acts 13:39) and the unbeliever rests already under that condemnation which he fears the Son of God may some day pronounce against him.
- H. When God judges a man by his faith, the judgment is not arbitrary and irrational. Men believe according to the secret desires and aspirations of their heart.

## X. ***The Parallel Ministry Of Jesus And John***

- A. We do not know how long Jesus remained in Judea, but it may have been from April to December, for the passover was in April and December was "yet four months" before the harvest (John 4:35).
- B. John's gospel, in contrast to Matthew, Mark and Luke, shows that the ministry of Christ was well under way before John the Baptist was killed.
- C. John 3:26 shows that John's disciples looked upon Jesus as One who owed all His position and popularity to John's testimony, and were surprised to find that Jesus was surpassing John. John replied that a man can only take what is given him; the Son of God takes what He chooses. The friend receives only what hospitality extends to him, but the heir takes what he will, as the owner of the house.
- D. John knew that his work would decrease. He was a Jewish prophet, and as the power of the new dispensation under Christ gained headway, the old dispensation, of which he had been a part, was ready to vanish away.
- E. John looked upon Jesus as being so far above all earthly prophets that no prophet could reveal Him. God must be self-revealed. To receive Christ's witness was to publicly confess a conviction that God was true -- true to His promise that He would send a Messiah.
- F. "Obeyeth" stands in contrast with "believeth" in the first clause. No mental assent, however strong, is reckoned by the scriptures as faith unless it results in obedience (James 2:20; Romans 1:5). The unconverted sinner rests under the wrath of God. This verse shows that God had to be appeased just as truly as man had to be reconciled.

## XI. ***Christ's Reasons For Leaving Judea***

- A. John had fearlessly spoken the truth to Herod. From Josephus we learn that Herod imprisoned John at the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. The duration of the ministry of John is variously estimated at fourteen to eighteen months.
- B. Jesus instituted baptism and His disciples administered it. We nowhere hear of the disciples of John administering baptism. In fact, John, like the disciples of Jesus, baptized under a divine commission and could not delegate the power to others.
- C. Jesus did not go into Galilee for fear of Herod. The absence of John called for the presence of God. The northern part of Palestine was the most fruitful soil for the gospel. During the last six or eight months of John's ministry we find him in this region, preparing it for Christ's kingdom.
- D. Owing to the hatred which existed between Jews and Samaritans, many of the Jews went from Jerusalem to Galilee by turning eastward,

crossing the Jordan and passing northward through Perea. This journey required about seven days, while the more direct route through Samaria only took three days. Galileans often passed through Samaria on their way to and from the Jerusalem feasts.

## **XII. *Jesus In Samaria At Jacob's Well And In Sychar***

- A. Sychar was a small town and it adjoined the land which Jacob gave to Joseph (Genesis 33:19; 48:22; Joshua 24:32), and Joseph's tomb was about one hundred yards east of it. The word "Sychar" means "town of the sepulchre," referring to this tomb.
- B. John gives us important insight on this occasion as to the humanity of Jesus. Jesus met this woman on the ground of common humanity, and conceded to her the power of conferring a favor. The ancestors of the Samaritans were introduced into the land of Israel by the king of Assyria after he led the ten tribes into captivity (2 Kings 17:24-41).
  - 1. When the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon and began to rebuild their temple, the Samaritans asked to build with them.
  - 2. When this request was refused, an enmity arose between the two peoples which never died out.
- C. Living water would normally mean running or spring water, as contrasted with still or cistern water (Genesis 26:19; Leviticus 14:5). Jesus uses it in a spiritual sense. He fills us with His grace and truth and grants to us continual refreshing (John 1:14; Revelation 7:17).
- D. Jesus drew a contrast between earthly and heavenly blessings. No worldly joy gives lasting satisfaction, but Jesus is the bread and water of life to His disciples. The woman dimly comprehended the nature of Christ's offer, but knew it was water to be desired and that Jesus was able and willing to give it.
- E. She needed to be conscious of how much she needed it. Jesus, therefore, gave her a command to call her husband, that by so doing He might reveal her life and awaken her to repentance. The divine wisdom of Jesus brought to light a sad state of affairs.
- F. Perhaps prompted by the realization that He was a prophet, this woman sought to have the great dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans decided. Jesus responded that salvation proceeded from the Jews. In the days of idolatry in Israel, Samaria was a chief area of Baal worship, and in later days it was the home of magicians and sorcerers. God seeks genuine, and not formal, worshipers. He does not want those who render to Him the empty service of types and shadows, ceremonies and rites, which, through disbelief, had lost their meaning.
- G. John 4:26 is the first recorded declaration of His Messiahship made by Jesus. He was not confessed by Peter to be the Messiah until the last

year of His ministry. Jesus spoke more freely of His office in Samaria than in Judea or Galilee.

- H. The woman had a definite change of mind concerning Jesus. She invited the city to come forth and see "the Christ." His delight at the woman's conversion overcame for a time His desire for food. The harvests in the natural world are slow, but turning their eyes toward Sychar, they would see that spiritual sowing brings about a speedy harvest.
- I. "His own" received Him not, but these "strangers" welcomed Him. The stay was brief, but long enough to prepare the way for a future congregation among the Samaritans in the neighboring city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-8). A wealth of revelation and blessing had made the Jews selfish, and their conception of their Messiah was so perverted by this selfishness that they could not conceive of Him as being the Savior of the world. This incident shows that the gospel breaks down racial prejudice, elevates women and lifts up the degraded and sinful.

### **XIII. *The Arrival Of Jesus In Galilee***

- A. The "two days" were the two days spent among the Samaritans at Sychar. "Power of the Spirit" means its manifest use to perform miracles, rather than its presence, influence or direction.
- B. In Judea He had begun to receive so much honor as to bring Him into danger by the hands of the Pharisees. He would receive less in Galilee.
- C. The works which Jesus had done in Jerusalem were for the most part fruitless as to its inhabitants, but they bore the fruit of faith in Galilee. Of the many who believed in Him in Jerusalem, it is probable that a large number were Galilean pilgrims who were attending the passover.