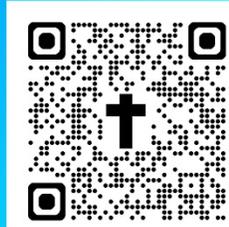


Matthew 3

Bible Study

By Gary Eugene Howell



Verses 1-2

Ask a volunteer in your Bible study group to read aloud Matthew 3:1-2. Then have everyone flip to Matthew chapter four and read Matthew 4:17

Observation: Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ

began their ministries by preaching repentance.

Discussion: What is repentance? Why is it important? If salvation is by faith rather than works, then what role does repentance play in our faith? If your Bible study group struggles with that question, here is a hint to help them think through their responses:

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you. (John 14:15-17 BSB)

When we love Jesus, we will desire to follow him. In loving Jesus, we take pleasure in keeping his commandments, thus we repent from our old ways and seek after His ways. Repentance then, is an act of loving Jesus, not an act of earning salvation.

Verses 3-6

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 3:3-6.

Observation: John wore shabby clothing and ate insects.

Discussion: Why is humbleness valuable in God's eyes? Why does God hate pride? Although you and I do not wear clothes made from camel hair and we don't eat grasshoppers, in what ways can we take on humility (not as an act. We are not performing theater. But in sincerity).

If your Bible study group struggles with that question, here is a hint to help them think through their responses:

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Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty pride, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4 BSB)

Verses 7-10

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 3:7-10.

Observation: John scolded the Pharisees and Sadducees and told them they needed to “produce fruit, in keeping with repentance”.

Discussion: From our previous question we just learned that repentance is how we show our love for God. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments”. Now we see John the Baptist reprimanding Israel’s spiritual leaders for not keeping with repentance. The Pharisees and Sadducees, however, are the foremost experts on God’s laws, so why is John making this accusation? What do the Pharisees and Sadducees do in their everyday activities that demonstrate they don’t love God? Remember, this is before Jesus showed up, so don’t point to their treatment of the Messiah as an example, instead, think about what they were doing prior to Jesus’s ministry.

If your Bible study group struggles with that question, here are some hints to help them think through their responses:

1. They prioritized man-made traditions over God’s commandments. (Matthew 15:3–9)
2. They sought honor from men rather than from God. (John 12:43)
3. They burdened others with laws but don’t live by them themselves. (Matthew 23:2–4)
4. They neglected justice, mercy, and faithfulness. (Matthew 23:23)
5. And most importantly, they did not have faith:

He said: “I will hide My face from them; I will see what will be their end. For they are a perverse generation—children of unfaithfulness. (Deuteronomy 32:20 BSB)

but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because their pursuit was not by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, (Romans 9:31-32 BSB)

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And to whom did He swear that they would never enter His rest? Was it not to those who disobeyed? So we see that it was because of their unbelief that they were unable to enter. (Hebrews 3:18–19 BSB)

Verses 11-12

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 3:11-12.

Observation: John says that the one who is coming is more powerful than he is. John is referring to Jesus, the Messiah. John has been described in the bible (Luke 7:24-35), as the greatest of all prophets, but he says he's not worthy to even untie the sandals of Jesus.

Discussion: How many examples from scripture can you think of which either demonstrate or outright declare that Jesus is more than a prophet, more than a good moral teacher, more than an enlightened spiritual guide?

If your study group struggles with that question, here are some hints to help them think through their responses:

- Jesus calming the storm – (Matthew 8:23–27)
- Jesus walking on water – (Matthew 14:22–33)
- Jesus raising the dead
 - Jairus's daughter: (Mark 5:35–43)
 - Widow's son at Nain: (Luke 7:11–17)
 - Lazarus: John (11:1–44)
- Jesus forgiving sins – (Mark 2:1–12)
- Jesus states “Before Abraham was, I AM” – (John 8:58)
- Jesus states “I and the Father are one.” – (John 10:30)
- Jesus receives and accepts worship – (Matthew 14:33), (Matthew 28:9, 17), (Luke 24:52), (John 9:38), (John 20:28)
- The Transfiguration – (Matthew 17:1–8)
- The Resurrection – (Matthew 28:1–10)
- His Ascension into Heaven – (Luke 24:50–53)
- Jesus states that he is the alpha and the omega – (Revelation 22:13)

Verses 13-15

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 3:13-15.

Observation: Jesus is fulfilling all righteousness by getting baptized.

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Discussion: What is the purpose of baptism? How does Jesus's baptism differ from our own baptism? How do our baptisms fulfill righteousness?

If your study group struggles with these questions, here are some hints to help them think through their responses:

Purpose of Baptism – Or aren't you aware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. For anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:3-7 BSB)

Jesus's baptism different from ours – Because Jesus had no sin, his baptism had no need of rendering sin powerless. Thus his baptism did not do for him what our baptism does for us.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1:18–19 BSB)

How does our own baptism fulfill righteousness – Our righteousness comes from faith in Jesus Christ, not the act of baptism. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we put on the righteousness of Christ. However, our obedience comes by way of faith. Our actions become an expression of our faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism is often one of the first public acts of obedience for many new believers, thus fulfilling the righteousness of putting one's faith in Christ.

Through Him and on behalf of His name, we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (Romans 1:5 BSB)

God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 BSB)

A few New Testament examples suggest that baptism may be the moment in which some people receive the Holy Spirit.

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On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:5-6)

Verses 16-17

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 3:16-17.

Observation: The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism.

Note to Bible study leader – This moment is a great opportunity to share the gospel with your study group. Just because a person attends a Bible study doesn't mean they are saved. The Israelites followed God for 40 years in the desert, and yet they still went to hell because of their lack of faith. There will be many Christians who are told on the last day, "I never knew you," because they were never filled with the Holy Spirit due to their lack of faith—some of them despite having attended church every Sunday.

Our having just read about the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, is a good segway for you to talk to your group about them receiving the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ.

Ask your bible study group, "How many of you are confident that you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit?" *Don't give them time to answer.* Let's review why we are putting our faith in Jesus Christ and then talk about how we receive the Holy Spirit.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they brought death into the world. From that very first moment God had a plan to save people from hell. Critics will ask, "Why would an all-loving God send anyone to hell?" The answer is that our all-loving God saves people from hell. And how does he do that?

Jesus was a sinless sacrifice who took our sins upon the cross and received the death penalty in our place. For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

He was buried and then three days later he rose from the dead, defeating death and the grave. Now, if we put our faith in him, our sins will be forgiven and we will gain eternal life.

It is through faith that we can ask the Lord for the blessed Holy Spirit.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

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The bible says that today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). You don't need to wait until you've "cleaned yourself up"—Jesus came to save sinners, not the righteous. You simply need to believe the gospel, and ask. God is faithful to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask in faith. If you're unsure whether you've truly received the Holy Spirit, we're going to pray right now, and as you pray silently, I want you to ask, seek and knock that the Lord would give you the Holy Spirit.

Bible study leader, take a few moments to pray out loud that God would fill the members of your study group with faith and the Holy Spirit.

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Free Bible Study Resources for Bible Study Leaders

By Gary Eugene Howell

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Dear Bible study leader: Here are a few tips on how to conduct a good Bible study that will foster spiritual growth in those attending.

First: Prepare for your Bible study by spending quality time in prayer in the days or week ahead of the study. Seek not to rely upon your own strengths and abilities, but instead rely upon the Lord.

Second: Begin your group bible study by taking prayer requests. If you have less than 25 people in your group, be bold by asking every individual, by name, what they would like prayer for. Then ask the group members to pray for one another. (You can ask, “who would like to pray for John?” or you can ask that everyone pray for the person on their left), however you choose to organize it is fine. Make sure you take notes on what people are asking prayer for. Then, before you begin the group prayer, ask if anyone needs a reminder of who and what they are praying for. If your group spends the whole hour praying and you never get to discuss the bible study, that’s perfectly fine.

Third: Do not take the route of preaching a sermon. Your Bible study attendees can hear a sermon on Sunday. Instead, set a goal loosely to be the person who speaks the least during your Bible study session. When you ask the group a question, you may have to sit in silence for several seconds until someone offers a response. If after 20 seconds, no one has said anything, try rephrasing the question and asking it again another way. Then give the members time to contemplate their response.

Fourth: Many Bible study sessions are shallow. Shallow Bible studies are produced by asking simple questions which require only one or two-word answers. Your goal, however, is to take your Bible study attendees deeper into God’s word. Lead your group in examining the context and meaning of the verses or chapter being studied. Then discuss the application but remember, the Bible is not a self-help book for behavior modification. Rather, the Bible tells us about Jesus. What he did for us, is doing within us, and how he saves us.

Fifth: Hopefully you will have two or three attendees who carry the discussion. These will be the individuals who are ready to talk about the word of God. However, be prepared (figure out what you’re going to say ahead of time), if one individual attendee seeks to dominate the discussion. If one attendee desires to monologue for five or ten minutes without giving anyone else a chance to speak, you will need to find a nice and polite way to keep that individual in check.

Sixth: It’s perfectly okay if you don’t get to all the questions presented in this bible study. If you ask the first question and your group spends the remainder of the hour discussing it, your job is done. You had a successful bible study. Don’t be concerned that you didn’t get to the rest of the questions.