

Affirmation  
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Matthew 3:13-4:11

We all know the childhood game “follow the leader.” The object of the game was to imitate the leader's actions (skipping, jumping, making silly gestures) exactly as they perform them while staying in a line behind the leader. Fail to copy the leader correctly and you're out. Last one standing (the most accurate follower) wins.

Let's talk about why someone would voluntarily (key word voluntarily) follow a leader. First, what does it mean to “follow” a leader? What characteristics in the leader make them worthy of following? What characteristics in the follower play a role?

The point: The most important decision in anyone's life is whether to follow Jesus Christ. Not just admire His teaching or His example, but whole-heartedly surrender every part of life to Him as God's Son, humanity's Savior, and to His leadership as Lord of your life. We do that through faith, and we CAN only do it because of His grace paid for by His sacrificial death and resurrection. It begs the question: “*Why follow Jesus?*”

Welcome back to the New Testament and our study of Matthew's gospel. The word gospel means “good news” and specifically the good news of salvation in Christ. The first four books of the New Testament are first-hand narrative accounts of the earthly life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. The first three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called “synoptic” gospels. “Syn” means together (synchronize) and “optic” means see. These writers “saw the ministry of Jesus from a similar point of view.”<sup>i</sup>

This week's text takes us to just before Jesus began His earthly ministry.

**Matthew 3:13–4:11 (ESV)** — **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.”

- Jesus was sinless, so confession and repentance (sorrow for sin) weren't necessary for Him. John (the Baptist) protested: “*You should baptize ME!*”
- What was Jesus modeling even before He called His first followers?
- Verse 15: Jesus said His baptism would “*carry out all that God requires.*”<sup>ii</sup>
- Let's be clear, baptism doesn't make anyone righteous. That would contradict the truth that salvation is only by God's grace and our faith (Eph. 2:8-10).
- Wiersbe: “*Why was Jesus baptized? First, His baptism gave approval to John's ministry. Second, He identified Himself with publicans and sinners, the very*

people He came to save. But mainly, His baptism pictured His future baptism on the cross (Matt. 20:22; Luke 12:50) when all the “waves and billows” of God’s judgment would go over Him (Ps. 42:7; Jonah 2:3).”<sup>iii</sup>

- To baptize means “to immerse” and represents a believer’s union with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Going under the water symbolizes dying to the old life, while rising represents new life in Christ. Baptism is a symbolic act of obedience and public declaration of faith, though it is not required for salvation. We call it “believer’s” baptism because it happens after a profession of faith.
- A factor in following a leader is whether they have evident credentials. This event demonstrated God’s affirmation of Jesus and His mission on earth.
- Verses 16 & 17 document two supernatural events that would set Jesus apart from any “religious” teacher who ever walked the earth: God’s Spirit descended on Jesus “like a dove” and God’s voice from Heaven declared: “This is my Son.”
- One commentator wrote: “*The significant thing about the baptism of **Jesus** was the authentication from **heaven**.*”<sup>iv</sup>
- God’s voice affirmed Jesus as His Son on two other occasions:
  - Transfiguration - Peter, James, and John explicitly heard the voice from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son” (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).
  - John 12:28-30 tells us a crowd heard a heavenly voice glorifying Jesus’ name, though some perceived it as thunder or an angel.
- Assuming the voice of God was heard by others (not just John the Baptist), imagine how the report would have spread (even without the internet)!
- Scripture tells us Jesus’ miracles also soon led to large crowds following Him.
- What about the significance of the Spirit’s appearance?
- The prophet Isaiah said of the coming Messiah: “*And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*” **“Is. 11:2 (NLT)**
- **John 1:32–34 (NLT) — 32** Then John (the Baptist) testified, “I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. **33** I didn’t know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ **34** I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God.”
- Another significant point: All three persons of the trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) were in attendance “inauguration” of Jesus’ earthly ministry.
- Jesus was affirmed as God’s Son through obedience in baptism, the anointing of God’s Spirit, and the word of God’s voice.
- We should also remember, the Jews in that day were looking for more than a leader – they anticipated a promised Messiah (anointed one). See: Isaiah 9:6–7 & Micah 5:2
- Later in Jesus’ ministry when He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, she said, “I know that Messiah is coming” (John 4:25) and wondered aloud to her people, “Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29).
- He was affirmed by His obedience, the Spirit’s appearance, and God’s voice. He was also affirmed in His mission by a time of temptation.
- Look at chapter four.

**4:1** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4** But he answered, “It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ” **7** Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’ ” **11** Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

- Why did the Father send Jesus to be tempted? Adam and Eve were tempted and failed bringing sin into our world. Jesus (the “second Adam”) was tempted and did not sin as a part of His plan to bring payment of sin into the world.
- Jesus’ three temptations mirror the patterns common to all humanity.
  - The first (Matthew 4:3–4) targeted the lust of the flesh, tempting Him to satisfy hunger apart from God’s will.
  - The second (Matthew 4:5–7) appealed to the pride of life, urging Him to prove His identity by a reckless act.
  - The third (Matthew 4:8–10) tested the lust of the eyes, offering worldly power in exchange for worship.
  - Jesus rejected them all by quoting from Deuteronomy.<sup>v</sup>
- Jesus’ temptation served to test and affirm His identity as the sinless Son of God, allowing Him to identify with human struggles while demonstrating victory over Satan through obedience to Scripture.<sup>vi</sup>
- **Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)** — **8** Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.
- Why does Jesus’ being tempted by Satan to sin help us relate to Him?
- **Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)** — **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
- What does Jesus’ method for responding to Satan’s temptations teach us?
- **Ephesians 6:17 (ESV)** — **17** ...take...the sword of the Spirit...the word of God,
- **Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)** — **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- **John 8:32 (ESV)** — you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- Question: How do you know when Satan is lying? Answer: His lips are moving!
- Jesus was teaching us to respond to Satan’s lies with the TRUTH of God’s word.
- Look at verse six. What was Satan’s tactic (which he also used with Eve)?

- **Deuteronomy 4:2 (ESV)** — 2 You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God...
- **2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.
- You will notice that we are studying this passage using the method of comparing scripture with scripture. The fancy word is “Hermeneutics.” Comparing scripture with scripture is a key Bible study method based on the idea that clear passages help explain difficult ones. It focuses on the Bible’s internal consistency rather than external opinions and reflects how Jesus and Paul interpreted Scripture.
- Verse 11 teaches us a truth that James wrote about in **James 4:7 (ESV)** — 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

### So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The most important decision in anyone's life is whether to follow Jesus Christ. Not to just admire His teaching or His example, but to whole-heartedly surrender every part of life to Him as God's Son, our Savior, and Lord of life.
- When Jesus walked the earth proclaiming Himself as God’s Son, His sinless life and powerful miracles caused people to recognize the truth and follow Him.
- The Samaritan woman at the well said, *“He told me everything I ever did!” Her neighbors said, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.”*<sup>vii</sup> (John 4:39-42)
- When Jesus asked Simon Peter, *“Who do YOU say I am”*, Peter declared, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (Matthew 16:16).
- Martha, the sister of Lazarus (who Jesus raised) said the same (John 11:27).
- The Pharisees chided the temple officers when they refused to arrest Jesus. The officers simply said, *“We have never heard anyone speak like this!”*<sup>viii</sup>
- The Roman Centurion at the cross said, *“This man truly was the Son of God!”*<sup>ix</sup>
- John the Baptist knew it, the twelve knew it, even one of the two thieves knew it.
- One might say, of course they believed because He was right in front of them.
- What happened then still happens today. People see how Jesus lived, died, and rose. Then the Holy Spirit touches their heart convicting them of their sin and confirming God’s words: *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him”* (Matthew 17:5)
- An old gospel song summed it up well:
  - “Never a man spake like this man, the glorious King of Kings.  
He spoke to my troubled soul and now my heart sings.  
He has promised in His Holy Word someday His face I’ll see.  
Never a man spake like this man, when He said, “Come, follow Me.”*<sup>x</sup>
- He still speaks, the Spirit moves, people follow and they are changed for eternity.

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<sup>i</sup> Dockery, D. S., ed. (1992). Holman Bible Handbook (p. 536). Holman Bible Publishers.

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- ii Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 3:15). Tyndale House Publishers.
- iii Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 17). Victor Books.
- iv Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). Matthew. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 25). Victor Books.
- v <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-temptations.html>
- vi <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-4/>
- vii Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jn 4:39–42). Tyndale House Publishers.
- viii Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Jn 7:46). Tyndale House Publishers.
- ix Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 27:54). Tyndale House Publishers.
- x <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBQXjegyfFU>