

***The Story Series***  
***Week 23: Jesus' Ministry Begins***  
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**[SLIDE # 1] THE STORY**

Today we continue on in our journey through the New Testament *Story*. We began by celebrating the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. We know very little about Jesus' early years.

**[SLIDE # 2] YOUNG JESUS**

The Bible does record Jesus speaking in the Temple as a young boy.

**[SLIDE # 3] CARPENTER SHOP**

And because of the culture, we do know that Jesus would have learned his father's trade – a carpenter.

**[SLIDE # 4] PORTRAIT OF JESUS**

But it is not until Jesus reaches the age of 30 that his ministry truly begins. What's remarkable about this age is that the average life expectancy in the Holy Land during this time is 30 years. When most people were preparing for death, Jesus is gearing up for a life-filled ministry. Remarkable, don't you think? Jesus' ministry lasts only three years, and it culminates with the cross and the resurrection which we will talk more about in the coming weeks.

**[SLIDE # 5] JOHN THE BAPTIST**

Jesus' ministry commences through his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

**[SLIDE # 6] WILDERNESS**

Then Jesus is lead into the wilderness for 40 days and is tempted by the devil. Jesus gets a taste of what it means to be human. But unlike us, Jesus is able to overcome temptation – each and every time.

**[SLIDE # 7] JESUS HEALS**

Jesus then leaves the wilderness and begins to share the glory of God in real, powerful ways. Through his miracles, and healings, and the stories that he shares, we begin to see who this Jesus really is – his character and nature.

Jesus is such a remarkable person that people begin to ask such questions as: “Who is this man?” “Where did this man get such wisdom, such power?”

**[SLIDE # 8] JESUS CALMS THE STORM**

The disciples were “astonished” the Bible says that Jesus could simply say “Be still” and the windstorm ceased. When Jesus told stories called parables, the people marveled at his wisdom. People had never experienced someone so powerful, so kind, so forgiving, so accepting. Jesus was unlike any person they had ever met.

**[SLIDE # 9] JESUS' BAPTISM**

You need to look no further than Jesus' baptism to sense the uniqueness of Jesus. In Matthew's gospel, we hear these words: As Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling upon him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him."

I've experienced some very powerful baptisms, but none as unique as Jesus' baptism. The heavens tearing apart like a curtain; the very voice of God bellowing, "This is my Son." God doesn't leave us guessing. From the very start, God says, "This is my very own Son. This is the one to whom I want you to listen. This is the one I want you to follow."

Now we must ask: If Jesus is the perfect Son of God, then why is Jesus being baptized? Baptism is for sinners. Baptism is that ritual bath that washes us clean from sin and the death to which it leads. So why is Jesus being baptized? Although biblical scholars offer many reasons, the obvious reason is that God is simply being true to his character.

**[SLIDE # 10] ADAM AND EVE**

If you remember back to the opening chapters of Genesis, we find God walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden. God is there with them, walking side-by-side.

So it should come as no surprise that Jesus has chosen to wade into the water with us, to do life with us, to once again remind us that God is with us.

**[SLIDE # 11] EMMANUEL**

Do you remember the name that the Christmas angels use to refer to Jesus? Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

**[SLIDE # 12] JESUS BAPTISM**

Jesus joins us in the muddy waters of the Jordan River, in the muddy waters of our life, and he purifies or makes holy our human experience. Jesus identifies with us so that we can identify with God.

God is trying to change our perspective. As we muddle through the murky waters of life, it is all too easy to focus on all the dirt, and to become overwhelmed by it. But God calls us to redirect our focus to the person who is standing right next to us -- none other than Jesus himself.

As someone once said, instead of telling God how powerful the storms are raging in your life, tell the storms how powerful your God is. God is stronger. God is our protector. God will not forsake us. God is with us and has promised to lift us up out of the murky waters of our sinful lives. That's a powerful truth that we learn from the life story of Jesus.

**[SLIDE # 13] WILDERNESS**

Jesus is then lead into the wilderness where he stays for 40 days and nights. He soon realizes that he is not alone out in that desert. Temptation lurks at every corner. Jesus didn't have to go

looking for trouble, it came looking for him. Can you relate? Once again, Jesus gets a crash course on what it means to be human.

Jesus encounters the Devil whose name in the Bible literally means “to divide.” The devil seeks to divide us, to separate us from the promises God has made. Jesus being tempted in the desert by the tempter transports us back once again to the Garden of Eden. There, the tempter appears to Adam and Eve (in the form of the serpent) and makes them question the goodness and trustworthiness of God.

“Are you *sure* that’s what God said?” the serpent asks. “Did God *really* mean that?” Such words have temptation written all over them. We know the story. Adam and Eve end up not believing, not trusting in what God has said, and sin – or disobedience to God’s will and ways – enters the world. Adam and Eve become divided or separated from a right relationship with God.

Similarly, the tempter appears to Jesus in the wilderness. It’s as if God is demanding a rematch. And this time, the story has a much different ending. This time, instead of questioning the goodness and trustworthiness of God, Jesus chooses to entrust his life to those very things.

#### **[SLIDE # 14] GOD IS ENOUGH.**

Jesus knows that God is enough. Repeat after me: GOD IS ENOUGH! Jesus knows that God is all he needs. Instead of becoming *divided* from God, Jesus chooses to remain *united* with God. Jesus’ faith in God the Father can be heard so clearly in the words he speaks: “People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. “You must worship the LORD your God and serve only Him.”

In the Genesis account, Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden because of their choice to question the goodness of God. The devil succeeds in dividing them from God. But in this wilderness account, the *devil* is cast out because he has no power against Jesus who has grounded himself, united himself with the solid promises of the Word of God.

#### **[SLIDE # 15] JESUS WINS**

As Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness, in this showdown between good and evil, right and wrong, heaven and hell, Jesus and Satan, there is a clear winner. God, in Christ, wins. And we stand in amazement at how strong Christ is. We are left asking the same question: “Who is this man?”

#### **[SLIDE # 16] FOLLOWERS OF JESUS**

From the desert, Jesus began to travel throughout the region of Galilee. He taught people how much God loves them. He healed people who were sick. And because he was able to do such great things, lots of people started to follow Jesus. They all wanted to hang around with him.

### **[SLIDE # 17] DISCIPLES**

From that group, Jesus chose 12 men who would become leaders with Christ to spread the story of God's love and salvation. They were known as the 12 disciples. A disciple is someone who learns from and follows a great teacher.

The disciples were not perfect people. They were ordinary people just like you and me – people who misinterpreted what Jesus meant, who were distracted by their own agendas, who ended up abandoning Jesus when he needed them most. The 12 disciples were slow learners, timid followers.

The disciple's humanness helps us remember that it is not our wisdom or talents or goodness that makes us worthy in the eyes of God. We are worthy in God's eyes solely because of God's grace, because God has chosen to love us and free us and save us, despite our unworthiness. That's why we call it *amazing* grace. God chooses to stick with us even when we don't get it right.

### **[SLIDE # 18] CROSS OF CHRIST**

In fact, through the cross of Christ, God says, "Whatever is needed, I will take care of it. My love will conquer all." Good news indeed! And so despite the disciples' lack of faith and commitment, they clung to the promise that they were loved and that their lives would be redeemed through the sacrificial death of Jesus.

### **[SLIDE # 19] PHARISEES**

Not everyone, however, was so thrilled about this Jesus. There were groups of religious leaders – Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees – who all felt threatened by Jesus. Jesus took the spotlight off of them, and so they became jealous and greedy.

Once again, the devil divides the religious leaders from Christ. The religious leaders were unable to see the ever-present love of God in this man named Jesus. He was invading their territory, and so they devised a plot to kill him. That's right, kill him.

Isn't it amazing that the story of Jesus' life has just begun, and people are already out to kill him? It's yet another sign of humanity's sinful nature. Although God in Christ has come to show us the way to our heavenly Father, we refuse to listen, to follow. We choose our own way over God's way, and we miss out on the riches that God desires to give us.

### **[SLIDE # 20 ] NICODEMUS**

There was one great exception among the clergy. And his name was Nicodemus. I'll close with his story. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of the religious leaders. If anyone should have felt threatened by Jesus it was Nicodemus. But Nicodemus saw Jesus differently than the other leaders. In the third chapter of John's Gospel, Nicodemus says to Jesus, "We all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." Nicodemus is speaking from the heart. "There's just something about you Jesus that is different. You make God feel so real, so close. Your words are so refreshing, so full of life and hope."

You see, Nicodemus was part of the religious tradition that demanded, “Try again.” But Jesus on the other hand says, “be born again.” “How can this be?” Nicodemus asks. “How can one get a fresh start, a new beginning?”

### **[SLIDE # 21] BABY IN HANDS**

Raise your hand if you had anything to do with your physical birth. Anyone? Food for thought, isn't it? None of us had anything do with our physical birth. And what Jesus is telling Nicodemus this day, and us, is that we have nothing to do with our spiritual birth either. In both our physical birth and our spiritual re-birth, it is the hand of God at work in our lives. Jesus has come into this world to do for us spiritually what our earthly parents did for us physically.

God has sent Jesus into the world in order that we might be delivered anew into God's kingdom. We are brought forth into the kingdom of God not by our own skill or might, but by a miracle of grace. Jesus tells Nicodemus, “Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.” God is at work in our lives, desiring to bring about something new, something beautiful in our lives.

And why would God ever think about doing something so wonderful? As Jesus tells Nicodemus,

### **[SLIDE # 22 ] CROSS ON WORLD**

“For God so *loved* the world...” There's our answer. God has chosen to redeem and save us because love is God's very nature. It was God's mission from the very beginning: to win us back; to reconcile our broken relationship. And God will do this through the sacrificial death of his sinless Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus has come into this world to offer us a new beginning, a new life. And the life Jesus offers us will never run out, or wear out, or go out of style. It is a life which will last forever, for all eternity. And while we are still on this earth, the Holy Spirit that God has placed within each of us is constantly at work, equipping us, empowering us to be witnesses of God's mercy and grace that we have experienced in the person of Jesus Christ.

### **[SLIDE # 23] SHINING LIGHT**

We are to be out in the world showering others with the love of God – the same kind of love that Christ has showered into our life. We are to be out in the world, and through word and deed proclaim, “For God so loves...”

### **[SLIDE # 24 ] ETERNAL LOVE**

For God so loves you... for God so loves me... and because God so loves, we need not fear. We will not perish. The devil will not separate.

Through the waters of holy baptism, God has claimed us as his very own children. And God has promised that nothing – nothing! – will be able to separate us from Him.

So who is this Jesus?

**[SLIDE # 25] STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN**

Jesus is the way, the path by which we will reach the gates of heaven and be blessed to see the very face of God.

**[SLIDE # 26 ] JOHN 3:16**

Let us close by saying together these powerful words from John's Gospel: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.