

Jesus' Early Work

Malachi's last words, and those of the Old Testament, promise to send "Elijah," who would "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal 4:6).

The New Testament clearly recognizes John the Immerser as the one who fulfilled this promise: "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). This fits with Isaiah's prophecy as well (Isa 40:3-5).

John did come before Jesus to prepare the way (Matt 3:1-3). He pointed to Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) He recognized that he must decrease while Jesus increased. One of the reasons that John came baptizing was so that Jesus "might be manifested to Israel" (v. 31). Jesus came to John to be baptized, not because He was guilty of sin, but rather "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15). As Jesus was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven and the Spirit descended as a dove upon Him. This identified Jesus as the Messiah from heaven. His baptism was also a way of signaling what He was going to do—it was a foreshadowing of His death, burial, and resurrection (see Romans



6:3-5 as well).

After the baptism, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt 4; Luke 4). By overcoming and appealing to what is written in the Law, Jesus demonstrated that He

fulfilled all that God intended for Israel. He overcame where Israel fell. In doing so, He became the perfect example for all.

Jesus went to the synagogue at Nazareth, His home town, where He was given the scroll of Isaiah to read. He read from Isaiah 61:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

He closed the scroll, gave it to the attendant, and said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). Here, the people were "speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips" (v. 22). Even so, He anticipated rejection, and it would not be long before people were angry at what He said and did.

He began performing miracles, demonstrating that He was indeed the Son of God. He had a right to speak with authority, and this is seen early on in what Matthew records that which is traditionally called, “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matt 5-7). At the end of the “Sermon” (which likely includes many points that Jesus taught multiple times in multiple places), Matthew tells us, “When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (7:28-29). What was Jesus teaching about?

Jesus taught about the kingdom of God (think rule or reign of God). Mark records Jesus as saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). The Sermon on the Mount is filled with kingdom teaching. The Beatitudes begin with, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3). From there, Jesus taught about the character of those who submit themselves to God’s rule. So important is the kingdom that it is to be sought above all else: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (6:33).

In this kingdom context, Jesus drew some contrasts between the old and the new, between what they had often heard and what Jesus would authoritatively say about it. “You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you” is the common phrasing. He taught about such matters as what it meant to be disciples in the world, the nature of personal

relationships, the proper view of prayer and fasting, overcoming anxieties, and the need to be aware of false prophets. He closed with His illustration of the wise and foolish men who built their houses on the rock or the sand. To hear and act upon Jesus’ words is the heart of wisdom.

Jesus chose twelve particular disciples to become His apostles. He sent them out, trained them, and spent much personal time with them. He was preparing them both to suffer for His sake and to take the gospel to the rest of the world. Sadly, one of these twelve would betray Him, but not for a little while yet. Next, we will overview some of Jesus’ parables and miracles.

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