



## There's no one like Him

Jesus is not a myth or legend. Jesus is not an ethereal religious figure. Jesus walked the earth at a specific time and place. There's never been another like Him. As we follow the life of Jesus of Nazareth through the Gospel of Matthew, we find our faith in Jesus rooted in the life of Jesus. Meet Jesus. Knowing this man will change your life.

## JESUS • Matthew 3:11–17 • Tim McConnell • March 8, 2020

How do you react to authority? Do you like rules or resist them? I do okay. I mean, if those are the rules, I can usually find my way somewhere within the limits. But sometimes I bristle at authority. You tell a kid not to do something and they immediately think, "Huh. Never occurred to me to do that, but ... sounds kind of fun now." I have an intersection nearby that has a camera installed. Sometimes, early in the morning, when the light is red and there are no cars anywhere, I wonder. But I'm always very good, I promise. I respect the authority. We are looking to understand the life of Jesus, the historical life of Jesus. We want to meet Jesus, the actual man in history. Meet this man and it will change your life, but first meet the man. One way to understand Jesus a little better is to understand the world He lived in. In the world Jesus lived in, His land was occupied by a foreign government and His people oppressed by Roman rule. They reacted to that authority in all the ways you would expect them to. What about Jesus? From the start, He presented Himself as different.

How did the people react to the Roman Empire? How did they respond to an occupying authority? Well, there were four groups with four different mindsets, and most Jewish people found themselves in one of these groups. There were the Sadducees who advocated for cooperation. Let's make the most of it and get along. What did they expect from God? They asked God to support their agenda; they wanted God to pacify the people. Keep things calm. There were the Pharisees who advocated for resistance. They believed if they could get enough people to follow God's law, God would intervene and throw the Romans out. They asked God to support their agenda, to liberate the people. There were the Zealots. These were the revolutionaries. They wanted to fight. The God they were trying to enlist for that agenda was the God who empowered David to kill Goliath with a stone. Then there were the Essenes. These are the people who withdrew; their policy is withdrawal. The Essenes went out into the countryside and established their own holiness communities. Let the world go where it goes, within our walls, we will remain pure and spiritual. They too wanted God to bless their agenda. They wanted God to purify them until they could escape the world. Four ways, four agendas for God to pick from.

Along comes John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea. John saw something new coming.

John believed God was about to do something else entirely, and when it came, it wasn't going to be about enlisting God to bless your agenda. God would bring His own agenda. God would bring His own plan. The question then isn't whether God will participate in your plan, but will you serve His? John baptized in the river Jordan inviting people to prepare, inviting them to turn around, inviting them to humble themselves. John's baptism invited people to change. But someone else was coming with the power to change. A few months ago, I waded into the Jordan River myself. Somebody asked me just last week about the Jordan River. "Yeah, how was the water? Could you see your feet?" It was fine. It was fine. It was something to stand in the Jordan River, I tell you.

Verse 11, John speaking, says, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11). See, John knew, even as he taught and baptized and performed his ministry, he knew, what he was doing was only an invitation to the party. There is one more powerful than John. He is on the way. John washes you with water; Jesus purifies with the Holy Spirit and fire. John washes you on the outside; Jesus changes you from the inside. John invites you to repent; Jesus empowers you to change. John hopes for salvation; Jesus saves. Which baptism are you living out? John's or Jesus'? More powerful than I. John hoped, waited, expected, anticipated ... then Jesus came.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' Jesus replied, 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' Then John consented" (Matthew 3:13–15). Jesus came to John. What a surprising thing, when it's Jesus whose ministry is rising and John's that is finishing. Shouldn't John come to Jesus? Jesus came to John. Jesus asked to be baptized. John said, "No, no, no. I need to be baptized by you." John was right, wasn't he? John offered a chance for a restart, repent of your sins. Jesus had no sins, if He was who we think He was. And that's how John the Baptist saw Him. John, who had been upset that the Pharisees and Sadducees were not worthy of his baptism is now worried that his baptism is not worthy of Jesus. "Do you come to me?" God comes to us with His plan, His agenda. John knew



something was coming, but when it came, would he lay down his own agenda? I think when Jesus comes, it always brings surprise.

What is Jesus' agenda? Jesus leans in close, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." In Matthew, these are the first words Jesus speaks. Keeping for a bit on historical terms, just in historical Jesus terms, what's happening here? A famous preacher with prophet-like qualities, John is out among his crowds doing his thing, teaching them all to expect someone coming who is better, greater, more powerful than he is. Then Jesus of Nazareth turns up and this man points to him. This man, John, says, "This is the one." But Jesus walks out and kneels down before him, and receives the baptism, "to fulfill all righteousness." What does that mean? Well, that means that this Jesus, whoever He is, thinks of Himself as part of a very important, divine and cosmic mission that is going to change everything. If you were a reporter on the scene, that's what you'd say. This is the historical Jesus.

Then something very odd happened. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:16–17). As we go along through these reports of the life of Jesus, strange stuff happens. Out of the ordinary things. If you are a skeptic, this is the stuff that drives you crazy. Can you allow that kind of event in the universe you know? If you are a skeptic, or in conversations with skeptics, here's what I want you to notice about these events. Ask yourself, does the author sound like he understands what he's talking about? For the most part, your answer will be no! If Matthew really got the significance of all this, we would have rafts of Old Testament references and color commentary and theological implications. This moment is ripe for all of that. But for the most part, the gospel writers take the tone of "You know, then this happened. I don't know what to tell you about it, but here it is." The heavens were opened to Jesus. The Spirit like a dove came down and rested on Jesus. A voice from heaven declared, "This is my Son." "Well, the next day ..." and on it goes. So that's what happened in the life of Jesus. He turned up at the site where John the Baptist was at work baptizing people, got baptized, and people witnessed some very odd events. That's historical, the life of Jesus.

What more can we say? Jesus came to John. I want to go back to that. Jesus came to John. If you believe Jesus was God, this whole event takes on new and deeper dimensions. Jesus came to John. We want God to bless our agendas, but God comes with His own agenda. Sadducees said, God help us cooperate—pacify us! Pharisees said, God help us resist—liberate us! Zealots said, God help us fight—empower us! Essenes said, God help us get out—purify us! Jesus comes with His own plans, His own agenda. God says, "Now I am here—to save you." And how does Jesus begin His saving mission? He takes the lowest position He can find. Of all the miracles of Jesus, here is the miracle of divine humility. Watch this, now, "John, John. Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." "John, let's do it..." It's so intimate, this moment in the middle of the river, Jesus' first words in Matthew, "John, let's do it now. This is what we need to do to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus includes John. Us. We. Together. Jesus, who alone has all the power and all the glory, never intends to go it alone.

Jesus comes to John. Jesus walks out to John. Jesus kneels down before John. Jesus includes John. For those who believe it, this is God come down. John saw no sin in Jesus needing forgiveness, no stains that needed a wash. But Jesus, in His first act of ministry, gets baptized. Not because He needed to be forgiven, but because we do. What's His agenda? In His first act, the first thing Jesus does is associate Himself with us in our need of forgiveness, renewal and rebirth. Jesus isn't purified by the waters of baptism; Jesus purifies the waters so we can be baptized. His first act is to come to us, to come to us in all our stain and shame and sin, to take the place we should be taking and play the role we should be playing. Do you see? He puts himself in our place. The surprising agenda of Jesus.

We know from later teaching that Jesus associated baptism with death. When James and John asked to share His glory, Jesus asked them if they were prepared to drink the cup He would drink and be baptized with the baptism He was going to be baptized with. In Mark: "'We can,' they answered. Jesus said to them, 'You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with'" (Mark 10:39), and what Jesus meant was that they would suffer and die just as He was going to suffer and die. When Jesus kneels for baptism, and says "let's do this to fulfill all righteousness," it's not the baptism He's

talking about alone. The baptism is the beginning of a mission. A mission that will include coming down, entering humanity, associating with our sinfulness, our need for being washed, taking our sin on Himself, dying on the cross, taking our sin to its rightful end—death on a cross—and going all the way down into death. But look at this. When He goes down, He bounces right back up! “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water” (Matthew 3:16). As soon as He went down, into the water, into the grave, into the death we who have sinned deserve, He bounced right back up. It’s like a basketball held under water. Sploosh! You can’t hold it down there! Jesus rises up, and three signs unfold. The heavens are opened. The Spirit descends. The Father declares His love. Three signs. Three gifts. Given to Jesus at baptism in the Jordan. Given to all who will join in that baptism now.

Why did Jesus come? “John, let’s do this, you and I, to fulfill all righteousness.” John says, “I’m not worthy. I’m not worthy to do this with you. I’m not worthy to stand here with you. I’m not worthy to tie your shoes.” “John, let’s do this, you and I, to fulfill all righteousness.” What fulfills all righteousness? God’s plan. God’s plan to seek and save and forgive. Jesus came to forgive. John offered a chance to change. Jesus offers a chance to be reborn. To have a new life. Once Jesus fulfills all righteousness, once He joins with us in our sin, dies on our behalf for our sin, and is raised to new life with all sin bought and paid for, once Jesus fulfills all righteousness, forgiveness is possible. For Jesus, “fulfill all righteousness” means to do what He was sent to do, to come and forgive, and save, and carry home. How many people have been washed in the Jordan since John started the whole thing? Wow. I don’t know. A lot. What would it feel like to wade out into those waters with Jesus? Would you feel worthy? Would you feel aware, exposed, ashamed? “Let’s do this,” says Jesus. His agenda was different from the start. “I want to see things set right. I want to see you forgiven and freed. I want to see the life you lead when you walk out of this river and up onto that riverbank with heaven opened, my Spirit inside you and the abiding love of God declared over you. Let’s do this,” says Jesus.

**STUDY GUIDE**  
**JESUS • “From the Start”**  
**Matthew 3:11–17**

**UP:** **UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word**

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Matthew 3:11–17.

- 1) What appears to be the most significant Kingdom reality at play within this passage?
- 2) Why does Jesus say He comes to John to be baptized? What does this mean?
- 3) What warning do we find in verse 12?

**OUT:** **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

- 4) What is Jesus inaugurating through His baptism?
- 5) Pastor Tim talks in his sermon this week about “God’s agenda.” What is God’s agenda in the world?
- 6) How can you further join God in His agenda this week as it relates to His Kingdom spreading throughout Colorado Springs?

**IN:** **Connect with Each Other**

Pastor Tim encourages us to imagine we are John the Baptist and asks, “what would it feel like to wade out into (the Jordan River) with Jesus? Would you feel worthy? Would you feel aware, exposed, ashamed?” Tim later writes, “we want God to bless our agendas, but God comes with his own agenda.”

*How are you doing in letting go of your agenda and living fully for God’s agenda?*