

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 7, August, 1999

“Living On Every Word From God”

by Sharon K. Griffie

Matthew 3:16-17 (NIV) - *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 lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Matthew 4:1-4 (NIV) - *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River he knew the time had arrived to begin his earthly ministry. He was ready to be baptized because of the long years he had spent in preparation. Now he must fulfill all righteousness through his obedience. He had been attentive and faithful in his personal relationship with God. The scriptures reveal that Jesus grew [increased] in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). It is no wonder that God was pleased with His beloved Son. Jesus had full understanding of the importance of the task God was sending him to do. With the Spirit of God upon Him Jesus enjoyed an exhilarating spiritual high, for he knew that he was the chosen one of God and that God had given Him the greatest responsibility in all the world. He had come to lead men and women from a life of sin, back home to God.

How was Jesus going to handle this duty? What method would he use to work out this awesome task that God had given him to do? The method he chose would be crucial, because it would determine how he could win men and women to God. There were two choices he was faced with. Would he continue to choose the way God had taught Him; that of living by every word that God spoke to him (see John 8:28-29)? Or, would the Devil be able to persuade him to get off of the Word, choosing his method instead; that of living by the temporary desires of the flesh? The point

for us to keep in mind is that there is no escape from temptation, for Jesus or anyone else, after a great spiritual decision has been made. The Devil will eventually show up, to try and tempt us.

Consequently, when Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the desert, he didn't go out there merely to be tempted (tested) by the Devil. Jesus went out there, because he needed time to be alone with His Father in Heaven, to fast and to pray before he began his ministry. He spent 40 glorious days and nights in communion with God, seeking necessary counsel from the Holy Spirit, before the tempter even arrived on the scene.

The tempter very subtly and skillfully chose the best time to attack - when Jesus was hungry! While he was at his lowest, physically weak and hungry from lack of food, the Devil tempted Him to turn the stones into bread to satisfy his immediate hunger. The tempter knew, not only that Jesus had the power, but that he could use that power *selfishly* for his own use. With his body in a weakened condition from hunger, the possibility was there for Jesus to do something to satisfy his need for physical nourishment. The power of suggestion (the bait) came easily for the Devil. It so happens that the Judean desert is scattered with round pieces of limestone, which looks like little loaves of bread. What was the tempter trying to do? In essence, he was doing two things; 1) tempting Jesus to focus on his own physical needs, rather than his spiritual ministry, and 2) tempting Jesus to prove that He is the Son of God.

If Jesus turned the stones into bread, he would, in effect, succumb to both temptations. It would also prove that the Son of God is more interested in satisfying the temporary desires of the flesh, than he is in satisfying the eternal desire of the Spirit of God.

Though weakened from lack of food and nourishment while out in the desert, Jesus remained spiritually strong. The solid relationship he enjoyed with God, gave him the strength and the ability he needed to face his tempter head on. Totally reject-

ing the temptation to build his kingdom on physical bread, Jesus boldly proclaimed: "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus also chose to ignore Satan's demand to prove He is the Son of God.

What a tragic mistake it would have been if Jesus had fallen for the Devil's method. If he had focused on his own physical needs and vanity, he would have literally cheated us of salvation, along with the gift of his Spirit. For without Jesus, "The Word," there would be no life in us. As he told his disciples:

John 6:63 (NIV) *The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.*

If the flesh had won out, Jesus would have been guilty of using his God-given powers selfishly to supply secondary needs. Removing the symptoms of physical hunger would in no way have satisfied the underlying spiritual hunger in the heart of man. The real cure to spiritual hunger is to remove the root cause. That cause was removed by Jesus at the cross.

Isaiah 53:4-6 - *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

No one is sovereign unto himself and it all comes down to the question of, "Who is going to be boss of my life, Satan or God (the flesh or the spirit)?" With Jesus taking all our sins to the cross, why is it that so many people still insist on carrying the burden of their own sins? It is for one reason only. Many people are still blinded by the subtle suggestions of the tempter who demands physical proof that Jesus is who he says he is! We begin to doubt the reality of Jesus being the Son of God.

Mr. John Kaminski, ex-prisoner and friend, recently sent an e-mail message from Connecticut. He wanted to share in the joy that he experiences each and every day as he faces the world with the

living God. I'm happy to report that John is no longer spiritually hungry. John wrote:

"All of my life, through all the pain inflicted upon me, and later through the pain that I inflicted upon others, both directly and indirectly; my question has always been more of a demand, according to the terms that I set forth, that God "prove" to me that he is real. Let me assure you that he is so very real, and he is inside each and every one of you. I see it, I hear it, and I feel it, from everyone every day. Sometimes it is so loud that it becomes deafening.

It took a suicide attempt and a detour in life for me to take the time to close my eyes and listen to that energy, the one that I can feel inside, deep in my innermost center, the feeling of calm that lies inside each of us, crying to get out. It is the desire to make someone's world just a little more special, without wanting anything in return. Just because it makes that energy inside of you, that piece of God - as I refer to it, just that much stronger, because it makes you that much better of a person. It is all powerful...it is giving back! I know now that I have a place in this world. I know where God is."



Questions for personal or group study:

1. The tempter (Satan) mocked Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Give modern day examples of how Satan tries to tempt us, and how we should respond.
2. Satan accuses us day and night. Find the verse in chapter twelve of the Book of Revelation, which describes two ways to overcome the accuser (Satan). Identify those two ways.
3. What truth can we learn from John Kaminski's experience, which distinguishes God's nature from that of Satan's nature? (hint, see John 10:10)
4. How is John Kaminski putting into practice his new-found belief in God? (hint, see Acts 20:35)
5. How do we hurt ourselves when we try to "prove" that God exists? (hint, see Hebrews 11:6)