

The Axe is Laid unto the Root

Matthew 3:10 – 4:11

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~ This report from our Spiritual Safari takes us to the river where John the Baptist is baptizing the people that came out into the wilderness to hear him preach. Our last report left him speaking very sarcastically to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Many people were willing to hear what John the Baptist was saying; but it was the way in which it was being said that did not appeal to most people. God's people heard His voice when John the Baptist spoke, though. Behold, John the Baptist introducing the Lord Jesus. We've had glimpses before - but we're going to get up close and personal with Him today. Christ is presented as the King bringing forth the Kingdom of Heaven now. If you have not read all of our reports from the beginning of Matthew then you may want to go back and do that now. It will truly bless your heart and you can easily catch up in Matthew....

III

10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

~ Of course, a great deal is said in the New Testament regarding fruit bearing. Well, bearing quality fruit is contingent upon the husbandman growing and nurturing the right kind of strain. Only a lime tree can produce limes. A lemon tree doesn't grow avocados. Either way, this tree is going to be cut down because it's not bearing fruit at all. In horticulture, it is possible to clone a clone of a clone continually and perpetually – the theory is that an endless strain is potentially perpetuated – however, there comes a time of genetic mutation after some number of cloning events. Changes begin in the root – not the fruit – but the problem is that the two go together. Once that mutation happens, there's nothing that can be done with the plant....

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire:

~ Let's immerse ourselves in some water for a moment, shall we? When Christ returns He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit AND with fire. The "AND" has already been two thousand years plus as I write. You are alive in the age of the Holy Spirit, my dear readers and fellow safari travelers - because we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. "Fire," however, speaks of His return to establish His Millennial Kingdom on earth - and it also speaks of consuming judgment. This understanding of distinction is critical unto a proper dividing of Holy Writ. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter writes, and we read, that, "...the tongues were 'like as' of fire that rested on them." It was LIKE fire and LIKE the sound of a mighty rushing wind. It WASN'T fire and wind, though – it was the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! The eye was appealed to that day; the ear was appealed to – so the account of Pentecost does not happen to fulfill the prophecy of Baptism by Fire, it just doesn't work out in Scripture that way. The Holy Spirit comes upon EVERY single believer today – not just some believers – ALL believers. Identification with the body of Christ is the pure definition of baptism for the believer today. One of the greatest truths in the Word of God is that we are "in" Christ; and that happens when we are baptized by the Holy Spirit of God! ~

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him because John could not understand why Jesus needed to be baptized by anyone, saying, don't I have need to be baptized by thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

~ Why in the world was Jesus baptized when baptism is connected with the need for confession of sins? If you consult secular learning the answer is myriad collections of resounding, “...we don’t know’s;” and off point answers, which is sad, because we have the primary answer given to us right here. It is essential for the fulfillment of all righteousness. Christ is identifying Himself unequivocally and unabashedly with sinful mankind to fulfill another prophecy, which says, “...He was numbered with the transgressors.” Friends, this should break forth lightening bolts upon your mind and heart. What king in the history of mankind has come down and identified himself with his subjects in the land? I think you know the answer is zero. That is the purpose of the baptism of the Lord Jesus – to identify Himself with us! Maybe we should all just write these things down today?

And while we’re writing, let’s just go over this again to be sure: Jesus baptism is NOT an example, and it is NOT a pattern for us to follow. Christ was Holy and had no need to be baptized. Jesus did not need to repent. You – and I – do! Jesus was Holy, Harmless and undefiled, and totally separate from sinners, when He voluntarily identified with the human race of mankind in baptism. Understand that Jesus’ death was also His baptism as he asked the disciple, whom he loved, “are you able to bear the baptism I am baptized with?” Christ entered into death for you and me. This also was the means by which Christ was set aside for His office as our Holy High Priest. Everything Christ did was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ was made sin when He had known no sin; He took it upon Himself, but there was no sin IN Him.

Today, we are saved by being identified with Christ! Are we saved by the physical act of baptism? - No, we’re saved by being indwelt by and identified with the Holy Spirit and by acting upon His leading in our lives. That means we are in Christ; and how do we get there? - By the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I believe in physical baptism to declare our position and I believe in submersion as the ritual. However, the ritual never makes salvation; Christ says, “come to Me and I will in no wise cast ye out.” Identification with Christ is ONLY done by the Holy Spirit. I now assign this as a duty to our safari members; and if you do not comply I will count it as

mutiny! We need to stop arguing about theology and learn to STAND for Him! ~

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

~ We have before us in this report and right now in your Bible reading the Lord Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit descends upon Him like a dove from the Father – that’s called the Trinity ~ Selah...Oh, what a King He is! And, with that, we’re going to abruptly fly away from John the Baptist’s sermon in the wilderness to Jesus temptation in the wilderness. I mean, why not? - We’re already out here. Immediately upon being identified by baptism Jesus was tempted; but Jesus isn’t tempted by the Father. Jesus is tempted by none other than the devil. So, will Jesus be able to withstand this test? Why? How? ~

IV

~ First, we must answer the question: ‘could Jesus have sinned?’ before we move along. That way we can go ahead and get Satan behind us from the beginning. “Temptation” has two meanings: first, it can mean to incite or entice to do evil - to seduce. Something in mankind is innate to yielding to that temptation. Christ, on the other hand, said, “the prince of this world cometh yet he hath nothing in Me.” Well, that statement isn’t true for you and me because there is a mechanism whereby we yield. Christ was separate from sinners so the temptation of Christ was different and greater than yours and mine is or will be. Secondly, “temptation” means, “test.” We saw in Genesis that God did tempt Abraham. Yes, God tested Abraham’s faith. God did not tempt Abraham and God does not tempt man with evil, though. James speaks very clearly of this – God NEVER tempts man with evil. However, Christ is going to be tested and it’s a very real test. So, I ask again, “could Jesus have sinned and fallen?”

We are going to answer that by saying, emphatically, dogmatically, unilaterally and without question: no, Jesus could not have failed this testing by the devil. There are too many strange things being said today about Jesus and His potential for failure. Now, I realize that some people reading along think I say some strange things, too. Unfortunately, a strange doctrine is being stated from the pulpit. I don't do that. Many wild and crazy theologies are floating around the internet. Let's try it like this: if Jesus could have fallen, then our salvation is not assured. So, the fair and sincerely logical question now becomes: was His temptation a legitimate and genuine temptation?

My answer for that is that His temptation was much greater than any temptation you and I have ever experienced or ever will experience. Naturally, a genuine diamond is tested to be certified. The same standard is given to gold. We don't test these things to show them as phony; we test them to PROVE they are genuine. We already know they're real. The Lord Jesus was tempted to demonstrate and to prove that He could not fall – EVER! See, man has a limit and, if you build up enough pressure, man will succumb to any test. Christ never gave in to Satan; even as the devil increased the testing and temptation. This is a thrilling contrast and comparison to the temptation of Eve. This temptation took place in the wilderness. Eve was tested in the Garden of Eden. Both temptations were physical, at first - and foremost. Eve's lure was fruit and Christ's bait was bread. Our first test is always physical for you and me, too, by the way.

Deuteronomy 8:3 - And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Jesus knew Deuteronomy and He knew it was His Word. Psalm ninety-one reads, "...for he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." The second temptation was spiritual for both Eve and Christ. Remember, Eve saw it was desirable to make one wise? Satan's suggestion to Jesus to 'cast Himself down' is the pride of life. These are all

the same areas we are tested in today, friends. As soon as you pass the physical test this spiritual test is going to come along immediately.

Lastly, the third way in which the temptation of both Eve and Jesus correlate is psychological. We read again from Deuteronomy chapter six at verse sixteen, “ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee.”

The psychological was the glory of the kingdoms. Man sure lusts for power today. Mankind lusts in his heart AND with his eyes all day long. People just happen to naturally love the things that are in this world today. That’s what Christ saw; and, friends, it was all pleasant to the eye....

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

~ This is another direct quote from Scripture by Christ. Deuteronomy chapter six at verse thirteen, "...thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth." Further, Deuteronomy chapter ten at verse twenty says, "...thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude."

My beloved readers, the Lord answered Satan every time with direct, relevant, correct Scriptural quotes! I pray I have brought a Bible message for all of us who read this so-called safari. Why do so many Christians live such difficult and defeated lives today? It's attributed to one thing and one thing only: a complete and utter ignorance of the Word of God. Christ answered by the Word of God and Christ has an answer for your particular present problem. That doesn't mean some man knows the answer to your problem and it's highly unlikely a psychiatrist or psychologist or pharmacologist will know it - or even be able to address it. In fact, I know man can't do those things. God does, however, have an answer for your problems in His Word – right now. That's why it's important that we know Holy Writ as properly, completely and correctly as we can. Christ's answers to Satan were very pointed and definite - and not open to interpretation. For a child of God, what The Word of God says is the answer and, for the child of God – that's enough....

11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

~ So, we end this leg of our Spiritual Safari through the entire Word of God with the same account another Gospel writer will provide, saying, "...the devil left for a season." Satan attacked Jesus every single day of His life; these are the only records we are given. When we get to the Garden of Gethsemane particularly – Satan shows himself again. Christ is the King Who could stand these tests; He is the only One Who could meet the devil and overcome him. I would encourage you to read ahead several chapters at this time – after praying for wisdom, judgment and spiritual discernment - to get a view of the entire land we're flying over as the Spirit of God carries us along in our movement through Matthew in our next report ~

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