

Out on a Limb?

“Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.”

“Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, ‘Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?’” (See John 6)

We are all familiar with this story. Some 5,000 men along with thousands of women and children were approaching Jesus and His band of disciples. At this point, He had already done many marvelous miracles starting with the making of wine out of water. Philip, being one of His earliest followers had likely seen them all and now he was on the spot. Jesus’ question led him to first consider the practical, the logical impossibility of the situation – “where shall we buy bread...?”

“But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.”

As we have written before, testing is an important principle of interaction with our Maker. Although God never tempts us with evil desires (see James 1:13, 14), He is very much into testing us at specific times for specific reasons. Yet, if you’re like me, testing in and of itself makes you uncomfortable because in our human experience it implies a pass or fail result.

John wanted to encourage our faith in Christ by recording a number of signs in his gospel. Nevertheless,

it isn’t the sign in this chapter that first grabs our attention but rather what prefaced it – the test. All believers are tested. Even Jesus was tested in all ways (Heb 4:15).

There, on the mountain, Christ knew what He was going to do so His question to Philip wasn’t posed to discover a solution to the situation. The Lord wasn’t befuddled or stressed out by the overwhelming crowd. The dining requirements weren’t the least bit intimidating for Him.

So why the test?

“Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.’” Philip concluded that it would take an impossible or at least unreasonable sum of money to do what Jesus was implying, and there He stalled. Don’t we often do the same?

Testing goes back to Eden where the choice to heed or rebel against God was placed squarely in the middle of the garden paradise. The first mention, however, of testing is in Genesis 22:

“Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’”

“And he said, ‘Here I am.’”

“Then He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’”

The Greek word for the test pertaining to Philip and the feast is the same one used in Heb 11:17 that points back in time to this passage of Abraham with Isaac. In other words, the same type of

thing was taking place with both men.

Throughout his pilgrimage, Abraham had demonstrated a full spectrum of human interaction with his Maker from:

- the obedience in leaving Haran to go to the promised land to
- the disobedience of bringing along Lot to
- the fear of man in Egypt when he portrayed Sarai as his sister rather than his wife to
- the courage and faith to take on five armies to rescue his nephew Lot to
- the carnal ‘helping God out’ by having a son with Sarai’s handmaid Hagar to
- the faith to bargain with God to spare Sodom for just five godly people to
- the bitter grief and discouragement when Sodom was destroyed to
- the abandoning of Sarah to Abimelech soon after God had promised a son through her to
- the obedience of the circumcision to
- the obedience of sending out Hagar and her son Ishmael to
- the test of Genesis 22 which is perhaps the most obvious prophetic picture of what the heavenly Father later did with His Son, Jesus.

It’s clear that God did not pick Abram to leave Ur and later Haran because he was initially full of faith but because He knew the end from the beginning. He knew Abraham. (See Gen 18:19) Christ didn’t pick Philip and the other disciples because from the beginning they were outstanding examples of

spirituality. In fact, Jesus, in answering Philip’s demand that He show them the Father responded, *“Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’”* Yet Christ knew the end from the beginning. He knew the Philip who would die a martyr’s death for his Lord.

So why the tests?

James tells us that there are various types of tests - James 1:2. Generally, there are two sources and two intended outcomes. God tests our faith. Satan tempts our flesh. The proving of your faith in Christ produces steadfastness and patient enduring – James 1:3. In contrast, the tempting or ‘baiting’ test is not from God – James 1:14. It is intended to lead us astray from the truth into sin – James 1:16

In Eden, we were baited by the serpent with fruit from a tree. This is significant and instructive for both types of testing involve a sort of tasting if you would. You see, throughout scripture, mankind is likened unto trees – usually fruit bearing trees. Israel is typified specifically by the fig, the olive and the grape. The righteous are likened unto fruit bearing palms. (Psa 92:12) Jesus is likened unto an apple tree as well as the trunk of the grape tree. He is also pictured by the Tree of Life as He is the source of life to men. The person who meditates in the Word of God continually is like a tree that prospers near the rivers of water. (Psa 1) The wicked are like a fruitless yet vigorous tree. (Psa 37:35) The faithful remnant of believers will be called trees of

righteousness. (Isa 61:3) Jesus spoke of righteous and evil men as trees (Mat 7:17, 18, 12:33) and even gave a blind man spiritual insight while healing his vision so that he initially did see men as trees (Mark 8:24). Paul likened believers unto wild olive branches grafted into the good olive tree. Jude characterized the false believers unto trees *“whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”* (Jud 1:12)

This tree imagery is important because it is intended to illustrate that God desires fruit from our lives – spiritual fruit. This is for our benefit and for His good pleasure. Jesus referred to our Father as the “husbandman” – the One who tends the vine or tree (John 15:1). Add to this what James recorded, *“Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it...”* (James 5:7) and what Paul wrote, *“The husbandman that labors must be first partaker of the fruits.”* (2 Tim 2:6) and you begin to get the picture. When He’s testing, His purpose is to patiently produce, mature and ‘taste’ our fruit. Jesus also alluded to this when He gave the parable lessons in Luke 13:6-9 and Mat 21:33 – 41.

I think that’s one reason He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden in the first place. Beyond the simple enjoyment of the paradise and the blessing of God’s fellowship, Adam was probably meant to learn that as he tended the garden to maturity so God is tending us.

Now, He already knows what kind of tree you are so to speak. He knows all things. And the good

news is that in testing us, ‘failure is not an option’ if you would. You see, He knows you and has promised never to test you to a greater degree than you can handle. (See 1 Cor 10:13). Like Philip, there are probably times you know you’ve fallen short, but you can be confident, as His child, that God is nonetheless working out His good will in you.

Peter, who, from our perspective, ‘failed’ the Lord at the very time he claimed that he wouldn’t later wrote, *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.”* 1 Pet 1:6-9

Additionally, the Lord may ‘taste’ the fruit of His work in your heart, but He is ever the initiator, for He first instructs us to taste His ‘fruit’, the fruit of His Spirit. See Gal 5:22, 23.

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;” Psa 34:8

The psalmist praises, *“How sweet are Your words to my taste,*

Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” Psa 119:103

It is written of the Beloved (Jesus) in the Song of Songs, *“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet*

to my taste.” Song 2:3

Peter wrote, *“...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”* 1 Pet 2:2, 3

You see, in tasting the fruit of His Spirit, we experience the planting, watering, pruning, cleaning, fertilizing and weeding of His gentle hands which in turn causes us to bear the same kind of fruit. Love begets love!

Now, when Satan is testing or tempting, he is trying to get us to taste his fruit which simply appeals to the desires of our flesh. In fact, he is known as the “tempter” in scripture and his desire is to destroy us. James wrote, *“...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”* James 1:14, 15 And Peter wrote, *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”* 1 Pet 2:11

So back to Philip and Abraham. As Jesus showed, God knows what He’s going to do ahead of time, all the time. He knows what kind of ‘tree’ you are. If you’re born again, you are “His planting” (Isa 60:21, 61:3). On the mount with Christ, Philip came up short in faith, but Jesus never came down on him for missing the point. On the mount with Christ, the maturity of Abraham’s faith was demonstrated and God commended him. On the mount alone, Christ passed the ultimate test of faith in our Father. In all cases, the Lord was glorified.

In testing our faith, God is ever

glorified; of that you can be confident. In baiting a sincere believer’s flesh, Satan, though at times seemingly successful, is fighting a lost battle - Calvary settled the issue.

You know how you should walk, so walk. And always remember, when you belong to the Lord, no created thing can separate you from His love. As Paul concluded, *“...the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ... What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?...*

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written:

‘For Your sake we are killed all day long;

We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’”

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:2,3 & 31-39) Hallelujah!