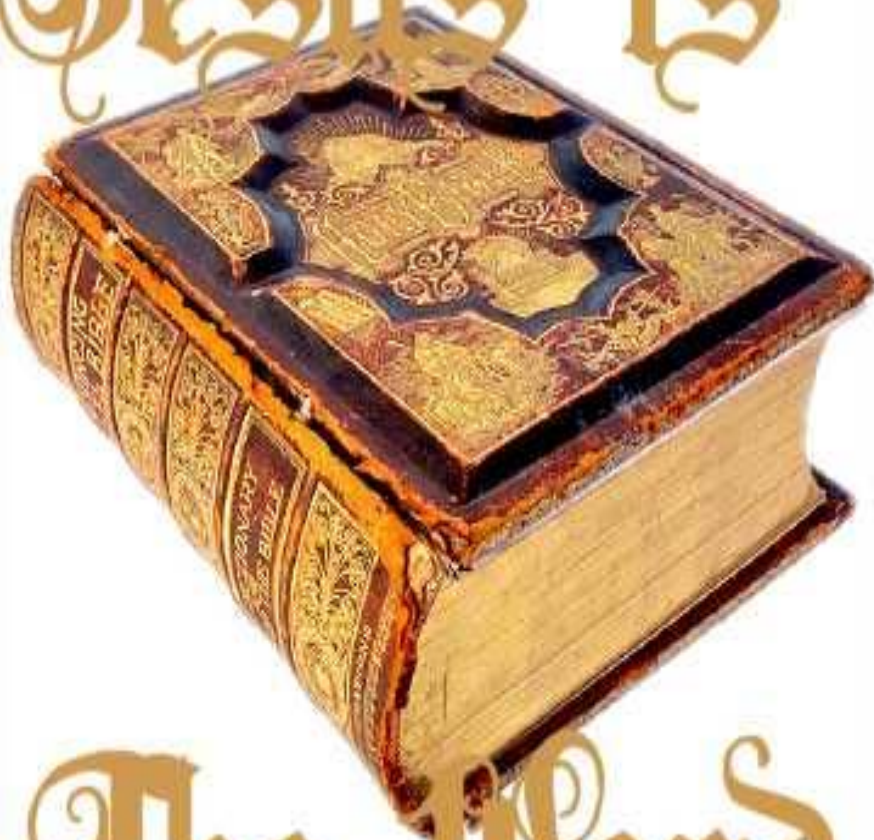


Jesus is



The Word

Dessert First Please!

I saw a tee shirt once. On the front, the message read, "Life is Uncertain, Eat Dessert First." I feel that way sometimes! I want the "dessert" experiences — the really good, neat, tasty things that happen in life. There just never seems to be enough experiences like that. On the other hand, we all have what I call "desert" experiences, times of temptation and struggle. They seem to pop up much more often. Kinda like someone waiting to say, "gotcha".

Read Matthew 4:1-17. It's Matthew's account of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. He found Himself led by the Spirit in the desert. He 'appeared' to be alone as He faced this experience. He was tempted by the Devil throughout this desert tour.

Imagine Jesus in a lonely, forsaken place, . . . without food for forty days and hungry, . . . in a wasteland, both physically and spiritually.

Satan came to Jesus and offered so much! His solutions seemed so easy and simple. That's part of the desert experience — hardship and temptation, struggles and enticing but empty solutions.

We have our desert experiences, too. We don't even have to physically be in the desert to experience them. The desert can be spiritual, emotional, and social — a lonely, forsaken place, a wasteland! Let's look at some of the qualities of a desert experience:

- **Sense of being ALONE.** There may be a million people around, it doesn't matter, we feel alone. There are still some things we have to face alone that no one can save us from.

- **Sense of life reduced to bare ESSENTIALS.** The desert reduces concerns to survival and staying alive. Ever feel like that?
- **The desert makes us long for RELIEF.** We seek to get out of the desert experience. That's when we are really vulnerable to temptation. Satan seems to show up when we are at our weakest offering us **enticing**, but also **enslaving** ways out.

Satan presented Jesus with three specific temptations. Please read over these specific temptations for a few moments. Now, I want to ponder this question: "How did Jesus face each temptation?" In my humble opinion, the three temptations break down like this:

1. **Stones to bread** = temptation to meet a good, legitimate need (hunger) by means of a bad, illegitimate way (by giving into Satan and acting only in ones own self-interest)
2. **Throw yourself off the temple** = the temptation to be spectacular. That would have been quite a show, and might have even convinced some unbelievers. Once again, it would have been giving in to Satan and testing God.
3. **All the kingdoms of the world** = temptation to power. Power is a potent drug indeed. Those truly hooked on power will sacrifice all else to gain and retain it. Once again, Jesus would have been giving in to Satan, this time as a shortcut around the cross to command the hearts of people.

Jesus really faced down the Tempter in each situation. Take a moment to read Jesus' response to the Tempter's demands. All Jesus' responses affirmed the sovereignty of God! **They showed an intimate and practical knowledge of Scripture!** Statements like "it is written," and "it is also written." They each displayed a complete unwillingness on Jesus' part to act selfishly or even in His own interest! But one more insight is crucial here:

Notice that God had prepared His Son to be victorious over these temptations before they ever started. What are Satan's first words to Jesus? "If you really are the Son of God..." Satan couldn't arouse doubt, fear, or suspicion in Jesus' mind about His relationship with God. God had already made clear at Jesus' baptism when He claimed that Jesus is "my son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased."

God won and Satan lost in this encounter. Guess what? God will **ALWAYS** win! In the end, Satan will **ALWAYS** lose. We know who will win. Do we want to be on the winning side? Or will we give up, and give in to temptation and side with the Loser of all eternity? After all, God always provides a way of escape (**I Corinthians 10:13**), right!?

Sounds so easy, doesn't it. But when we're in the desert it is not easy! It's excruciating. It's lonely. It's hard. It's a wasteland! So how do we look to Jesus and find inspiration for our trip through the desert? Well...

Let's first acknowledge that winning the battle of the desert doesn't begin in the desert. Jesus defeated Satan because He knew God and also knew that God loved Him. What are we doing to grow in our knowledge and experience of God - not as a subject to be studied but as a Father to be known? Let's get to know God, our loving Father, better. Allow Him to "pitch His tent" in us.

Second, let's see the importance of exalting God to the place of praise and worship in our lives. Knowing the value of the key players in our desert drama helps us see beyond Satan's deceptive, short-sighted and destructive offers.

Third, we need to know the Scriptures. Not to be a Bible thumper, but to be a Satan thumper! We don't spend time in Scripture to win arguments, but to win the war against the enemy, Satan! We can crowd out his evil lies

by knowing God's truth and answering his perversions of God's will with God's truth; "it is written and it is also written."

Fourth, let's stay involved with God's family the way we feel the arms of God's love and hear the voice of His support and encouragement is from hearing it from His family. We need to be deeply rooted in the Body of Christ so that when Satan comes to us and tries to make us feel all alone and not a part, we can know it is not true. We know we are His children whom He loves and that we bring Him pleasure!

We'd all like a trap door that would allow us a last minute escape or a band of angelic storm troopers to come in and beat the tar out of the devil and rescue us from our war with the evil one. But like Jesus, our times in the desert are most often won before we get there because of the spiritual connections and disciplines we've already developed in our lives. So if we're on the winning team, let's spend time with the winners. Let's praise and worship God by putting both acts in the highest place in our lives. Let's get to know God better and spend more time in His Word. Then we can resist the attacks of the 'Loser' and win the war in the desert that insures life's greatest dessert, the Kingdom.

Now, where is that piece of cheesecake, my broiled chicken will just have to wait!

Memory Text:

John 1:1-3 (Amplified Bible)

In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. He was present originally with God. All things were made and came into existence through Him;

and without Him was not even one thing made that has come into being.