

I BET YOU'RE FAMISHED JESUS
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Luke 4: 1 – 13
February 21, 2010 (First Sunday in Lent)

“Jesus...was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Jesus ate nothing in those days . . .”

Hungry, Jesus? I bet you're famished. You've been out here by yourself a long time without food. You're into this fasting thing in a big way, aren't you?

I admire that, Jesus. Course I'm an eat-drink-and-be-merry kind of guy myself. But I respect what you're trying to do out here in the wilderness – discipline yourself, get your head clear about this God stuff. I admire the effort...Jesus.

Course, I gotta tell ya – just being honest here – I think it's kinda futile Jesus. I mean, you're gonna go back and start talking about this Kingdom of God – this spiritual way of love that God's supposed to be bringing about here on earth.

But do you really believe that anybody's gonna give more than lip service to it. I mean, get real Jesus. This is a look-out-for-yourself-first, watch-your-back, dog-eat-dog world. Competition, winning, getting to the top, grabbing all you can, then hanging onto what's yours for all you're worth – that's what it's about. That's the agenda of the world, Jesus....

So excuse me, my hungry friend, if I say that this Realm of God, grace and love thing you're fasting about out here sounds like a prescription for failure to me. Nothing personal, Jesus, but in this world the winners are those who run the fastest, not those who pray the most.

Look around! The haves have and the have-nots starve. The strong win, the weak lose. The big animal eats the little animal. The one carrying the biggest stick gets heard. That's reality, Jesus. That's the way it's always been and will always be...God or no God.

But you think God's asking you to change that - do you? Gonna go around telling people to love each other because God loves them first – is that it? Sounds good, and folk will probably come around for awhile, cause you're the new guy on the religious block – a novelty. But what happens when people realize that your God-love doesn't get rid of the hated Romans, or lower their taxes, or cure cancer, or get their kid through college, or keep them from being downsized out?

They're gonna turn on you, Jesus. I've been around the block a time or two and I'm telling ya, Jesus, if this kind of faith you're selling doesn't provide the pay-off people want, they will turn on you....

Now, if you want to change these stones into bread, promise unlimited prosperity, that will sell. People will really love you then.

You see, Jesus, the secret to success is to fill their bellies and then tell 'em they're entitled to all of it and more. The name of the game is “indulge em.” And if you want to get anywhere, Jesus, be anybody, you better learn to play the game, preach the ole prosperity gospel. You know – “Follow me and God will reward you with anything your little heart could want.”

Listen, Jesus, my friend, you can talk about love and care of the soul till you're blue in the face, but when it comes right down to it, ambition and greed will win the human heart every time.

Think I'm being too cynical, Jesus? I call it reality. Cause I'm hell on reality....

Okay, let's take this "grace thing" as an example. How does it go again? Grace is something for nothing. Is that it? God loves people just because they are, so people are supposed to love each other just because they are. Right! In this old world, Jesus, grace won't win you enough votes to be dog-catcher.

Tell you what, my friend, if you want to get some things done...if you want a following, let me run your campaign. I know how to make you a real king. But you'd have to cooperate, do it my way. And my way is power, control, hardball.

The first thing we need to do is "can" those twelve losers you asked to follow you. You don't need disciples; you need a high powered marketing department that can put together a media campaign. You've got to realize that image sells.

So no more wasting your time wandering around among lepers and the poor and the rest of society's dregs. We need to get you on the cocktail circuit where you can rub shoulders with some real money. Get you among the real king-makers.

And we'll have to change your speaking style. These parables just won't make it. I mean, that story of the Lost Son is just too long. Who's got time to listen? And that one about the "Good" Samaritan pushes too many buttons. Come on, Jesus, you know people want simple answers. So you gotta learn to talk in slogans and sounds-bytes – stuff that fits on a bumper sticker.

And you have to stop talking so much about compassion and reconciliation and care for the poor. And the praying for enemies thing has got to go. Makes you sound soft. You gotta whip people up, poke their fears, get 'em angry at somebody. You know, a little old fashioned demagoguery.

I'm not saying, Jesus, that you can't talk about God. Cause people like to hear that God's on their side. That works. You can sprinkle the God talk around here and there. Throw in the promise of heavenly reward like dessert. As long as you don't get carried away and act like God really wants something from people here and now.

Jesus, listen, I've been around a long time and I've learned at least one thing – that people like to talk about God but that doesn't mean they'll change anything for God. So if you keep religion light, kind of like a hobby, you'll be okay. But if you get too serious about it, I'm warning ya man...they'll crucify you.

Maybe what we need here is to spin this wilderness thing in a way that generates publicity, gains traction as a news story, maybe even gets you on the cover of People. I can see it now: "Young and fearless prophet - Jesus survives wilderness ordeal."

People like that kind of stuff, you know. Cause they feel helpless themselves, overwhelmed by life, unimportant, afraid. So they'll flock after celebrity. That's what sells – with religion or anything.

You see, Jesus, if you want to be popular, if you want a mega following, the trick is to sound religious without suggesting that people really need God. Cause in their heart of hearts, human beings would really rather be God themselves. It's always been like that, Jesus. So do you really think you can change the human heart?

Don't get me wrong, Jesus. I admire what you're trying to do out here in the wilderness. It's just that your way isn't gonna work. And mark my words, you're gonna end up dead.

You are, you know – gonna get yourself killed. And then what?

But go ahead if you're that determined. Walk the path you think you gotta walk.

Course if you have second thoughts, Jesus, and want to try it my way...just yell. I'm always close by...