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W O R K S T A T I O N T W O



Gary B. Swanson

Thor Axel Kappfjell was at the top of his sport, literally. As a premier member of the worldwide BASE organization, he liked to jump off tall things; BASE stands for buildings, antennas, spans (bridges), and earth (cliffs). BASE jumping is parachuting from fixed objects. Fun, huh?

Kappfjell had gained quite a bit of notoriety around the world by jumping off things without permission. The writers of laws, policies, and ordinances tend to frown on unauthorized use of their properties in the pursuit of extreme sports. After all, there's this nasty issue of litigation.

He leaped off the 86th-floor observation deck of the Empire State Building in New York City and, three days later, the eagle heads on the Chrysler Building. In both cases, authorities, caught off guard, cried, "Hey, you can't do that!" but both times the adventurer melted into the crowds of the teeming city before anyone could nab him. When he had

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the temerity to jump from one of the World Trade towers, however, they were ready for him.

He was arrested and sentenced to seven days of community service.

Then in July 1999, Kappfjell was the third of 12 jumpers planning to leap from the 3,300-foot Kjerag, a cliff near Stavanger, Norway. It was Kappfjell's last jump: he hit the rock face and fell into a fjord.

When Jesus was on Earth, He was faced at one time with the possibility of becoming human history's first known BASE jumper. Rather than getting His name in this way into the pages of the *Guinness Book of World Records*, however, the account is reported in Scripture.

When you think about it, the New Testament is far more amazing than *Guinness* anyway. How can such things as the world's longest mustache or the most jumps recorded on a pogo stick or the largest tomato ever grown compare to the miracle of Jesus Christ?

Jesus' opportunity to become the

world's first successful BASE jumper occurred shortly after His baptism by John. "It seems to be the law of life that just after our resistance power has been highest it nose-dives until it is at its lowest."²¹ From the sublime moment of His baptism, Jesus was directed by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tested. There, in the loneliness and desolation of the place, He was confronted by Satan, who threw three pitches at Him, hoping that these fast balls would be enough to strike Him out even before His official ministry began.

In the second temptation, while Jesus was at the top of the temple, Satan suggested, "Throw yourself down" (Matt. 4:6, NIV). To some that may sound like fun, but, of course, doing something simply for the thrill of it wasn't the point. Jesus saw clearly what was implied.

In the cultural environment of Jesus' time, such a temptation would have been only natural. "It was a part of the popular belief that the Messiah should appear suddenly, and in some marvelous way; as, for instance, by a leap from the temple roof into the midst of the crowds assembled below."²² In fact, it is said that Simon Magus, the same sorcerer who tried to purchase from Peter and John the marvelous technique of bestowing the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, met his untimely end in an attempt in

the Roman Forum to demonstrate his ability to fly.

We're assured elsewhere that Jesus "has been tempted in every way, just as we are" (Heb. 4:15, NIV). Not too many of us, however, have been tempted in this specific way to become literal BASE jumpers. So how does Jesus' dilemma at the top of the Temple conform to the idea that He was "tempted in every way, just as we are"? How did that experience present a problem that is universal to the rest of humankind?

Jesus Himself provided the answer: the point wasn't adventuring, but presumption. Most dictionary definitions of *presumption* include such synonyms as "arrogance," "audacity," "temerity," or "effrontery." Though presumption seldom appears as such in various translations of Scripture, it describes a form of sin that recurs rather regularly. We see it in an arrogant idea that a tower would protect humankind from a future flood, in Jonah's audacity to question God's mercy in sparing the people of Nineveh; in the temerity of Jesus' brothers counseling Him that "no one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret" (John 7:4, NIV). Presumption simply means putting oneself in God's place, forgetting one's dependence on God.

In Jesus' temptation experience, Satan actually quoted from Scripture. Daring Jesus to throw Himself

off the pinnacle of the Temple, Satan reminded Him with wicked cunning, "It is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'" (Matt. 4:6, NIV).

When Satan quoted Scripture, however, he chose not to include a crucially important part of the passage: "to guard you in all your ways" (Ps. 91:11, NIV). If Jesus had followed this suggestion, He would have been venturing into Satan's ways, not the ways that God intended for Him.

Every temptation that comes our way is rooted in the idea that we don't have to take God at His word. It shows a distrust in God and in His revelation in Scripture. "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice" (Prov. 12:15, NIV).

God's power is not something that we can experiment with. It isn't

a mere weapon in our arsenal against temptation. It is a force that we're expected to trust quietly in our everyday lives. This is why Jesus answered Satan's second pitch by referring to the Book of Deuteronomy: "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matt. 6:16, NIV).

In Jesus' answer we can begin to see how universal this temptation is. Who among us can say we've never stretched God's protection for us a bit too far? Who can assert that we have never made an important decision that was based more on our own inclinations than on what we knew to be God's will for us? Who can claim that we are always totally dependent on God in everything we do?

REFERENCES

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), vol. 1, p. 64.

² James Stalker, *Life of Jesus Christ* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1949), p. 44.

