

A Time of Testing

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School wouldn't be so bad if it were not for the tests. I would rather the teacher just take my word for it-I know the material. Don't you believe me? Like Reagan said, "Trust but verify." A test is meant to verify whether a person is learning anything. Have you ever had one of those tests where everyone in the group had to prove together that they were learning? They all advanced together or were held back together. In seventh grade everyone in our Bible class at Georgia Christian School had to prove through testing that we knew all the books of the Bible, in order, and spell them correctly. If one person in the class missed one letter of one book, the entire class had to write all the books of the Bible 10 times, until we all proved through testing that we knew them perfectly. In some ways that is what we are all going through. None of us get to move on with our lives until everyone proves they can follow the rules or the guidelines-social distancing, washing hands, masks, wiping down surfaces. It is a test like in kindergarten-everyone has to walk in line until everyone learns to walk in line.

Testing is a frequent theme in the Bible. I like this text-because it sounds a little like what we are going through. READ Revelation 2:8-11. This is a 10 day test. Some tests last for years. Deut.8:2 says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands." In 8:5 Moses adds, "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you."

So we are being tested, whether by Satan's design or by God-no matter. Just as with Job, Satan may have been the source but God was the tester of Job's heart. Satan's tests are always meant to destroy a person, and God's tests are always meant to strengthen a person. SO HOW ARE YOU DOING SO FAR IN THIS PRESENT TEST? WHAT ACTUALLY IS BEING TESTED IN US?

Patience:

"Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." (Jas.5:10-11)

- The Lord's patience considered:
 - 1 Peter 3:20 speaks of the patience of God during the days of the ark's construction. He was giving people through the preaching of Noah the opportunity to be saved. How long was He patient? Best calculations, 60-75 years.

- 2 Peter 3:15 speaks of the patience of God today in delaying the destruction of the world, patience that can lead to our salvation. It has been well over 2000 years since the gospel began to be preached. That's patience.
- The Prophets
 - Example of Jeremiah who preached through the reigns of five kings of Judah, and none of them listened to him. But he persevered.
- Job
 - One of the longest books of the Bible.
 - Four friends, much dialog. He persevered
- Change our terminology to the other word James uses, often translated perseverance or endurance-synonym of patience-meaning to remain, and not flee. It is time for us to stand our ground. Not to run. Not to panic.

Compassion

- Often the motivation for God's perseverance with us is His compassion.
- When suffering abounds throughout the world we are tested in our compassion for others. Here are some ways:
 - Compassion for the frontline workers (the foot soldiers)
 - Compassion for those with the virus
 - Compassion for those who have lost loved ones
 - Compassion for those who have lost jobs or businesses
 - Compassion for the poor of the world who are hungry
- Phil.2:1-4, READ

Wisdom

- Times of testing require great wisdom to do the right things.
- When under stress we can be tempted to look for easy solutions to difficult problems. Considering all the aspects of a trial requires great thought.
- Notice the elements of wisdom described in James 3:17-18 READ

Faith

- James 1:2-3, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."
- Here is where my focus is-what is the Lord teaching me during this period of time, and am I listening, and will I obey?
 - Writing has increased
 - Technology harnessed for increasing our influence at Central
 - Opportunities to teach, though over the phone, and realize the gospel has a road to run on-there are ways to reach people.

Unity

- Keeping Central together has been a test.

- Many have stepped up to help:
 - Zone leaders-checking and meeting needs
 - Tech people
 - Ladies Bible class
 - Children's classes
 - Contributions
- Eph.4:1-3 READ-make every effort

The teacher is in the room. He has a stack of tests in His hands. He is walking down the aisles of the classroom putting a test face-down on each desk. The teacher walks back to the front of the classroom and says, "When I tell you I want you to turn your paper over and begin taking the test before you. Please keep your eyes on your own paper. Cheaters will automatically fail. You have one hour to complete the test. Do your best. Begin. What is the feeling you have right now? I think it will depend on how well you think you are prepared to take the test, how well you know the material, and how confident you are in your ability to just do your best. But, what if the teacher told you that He was going to give you 50 points just for showing up and taking the test? What if you knew the test came with grace? You still have to take it-just do your best, and you can ask your neighbor for help.