

2008, 2-10 Pass the test Matt 4v1-11 (Lent 1)

Some people dread taking a test. Their palms start to sweat. They go into a panic. And their mind goes blank. It's called test anxiety.

Well you may not like tests, but life is full of all kinds of them. The Israelites' faith was tested when they went through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. God let them be tested to see whether or not they had faith in him.

We go through tests every day. We may fall into sin or we may choose wisely.

Today I have put together a test to see whether we have sinned or not. This is a test. All you need to do is answer yes or no to the questions.

1. Have you ever been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy?

Disobedience can include anything that would break God's Law. Unfaithful could include looking at someone lustfully who is not your spouse. Lazy could include staying in bed on Sunday morning.

2. Have you ever been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome?

I think most of us have burst our top before. Rudeness may be overlooked but it is still wrong. Quarrelsome is an easy trap to fall into.

3. Have you hurt someone by your words or actions?

Words can certainly hurt, and unfortunately actions speak louder than words, and can often hurt more.

4. Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?

Stealing is a very broad term, stealing may include not working while we are on the clock, borrowing without paying back, and even the smallest smudge on our tax return would be considered stealing. We don't really need to go any further. We have answered yes to plenty of the questions already.

This extensive test is actually in the catechism under confession. It is like different way of looking at the commandments. These questions are actually an answer to this big question. What sins should we confess?

No human being could answer as if they had never sinned. Jesus asked a man once whether he had kept all the commandments. He answered Yes, which was a lie, but Jesus showed him that he was in fact stealing from the poor by hoarding everything for himself.

But Jesus was the one who stood the test. He was given the most difficult tasks and faced the hardest temptations. How did he do it? Well he was God, which helped. But he also was human. He felt hunger, yet he trusted in God's provision. He felt it necessary to prove himself, but he did not do it in order that he would not test God. And he felt the desire to rule the world and care for it, but he waited patiently to die and rise again so that he would rule God's way.

He stood the test so that we could have eternal life. This was the beginning of Jesus's passion. His passion that included suffering. His passion that included courage. His passion that was for you.

Sometimes we think that we can be like Jesus. We think we can live on the edge without falling off. Many times we are so confident in ourselves that we could never fall into certain temptations. But the right thing to do is to stay as far away from sin as possible, and never underestimate our sinful nature.

There once was a man who advertised for a coachman. Among those who came were two who seemed to him to be particularly bright. He came up with a test to see who would be the best coachman for his horse drawn carriage. He took them aside and asked

them how near they could drive to the edge of a precipice without falling over.

The first candidate answered that he could go within half an inch and had frequently done so, just shaving the edge and feeling perfectly safe. He then asked the other the same question. "Well, sir," replied the man modestly, "I really cannot tell, because I have never allowed myself to venture near the edge of a precipice. I have always made it a rule to keep as far as possible from danger, and I have had my reward in knowing that my master and his family were kept from danger and harm."

The master had no difficulty in deciding between the two candidates. "You are the man for me," he said, "the other may be brilliant, but you are safe."

Since we are not Jesus, we need to be safe. Being safe includes using the most powerful tool against temptation. That is God's Word, a.k.a the scriptures, a.k.a the Bible. We may not be able to quote Bible passages as specifically as Jesus did, but we can study the Bible, find passages that give us strength, and learn to discern when the devil is trying to trick us.

Meditating on the Bible gives us something like a heightened conscience. We can sense when something is wrong. We can find the weapon we need to stop the Devil.

The ultimate weapon we have is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. I don't know about you, but I have never been in a real sword fight. I never tried fencing. But it looks like it takes a lot of pin point accuracy.

We can learn to use the Bible with pin point accuracy. And it can become like second nature to us. A second nature is exactly what we need to stop our own sinful nature from giving in.

Maybe quoting the Bible is not as hard as we think. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, all of Jesus's quotations that day were from Deuteronomy 6 and 8. Could it be that the Lord's meditation that morning had been in this portion of God's Word?

Just having some daily scripture in our pocket can be enough to thwart the devil's temptations.

Now the primary application is that we also should learn the Word of God, and use Scripture to resist temptation. The devil hates Scripture and attacks it, he even tries to twist it around to say the wrong thing. So you need to know the Bible, not just memorize it. Here is a verse from scripture that says just that from Psalm 119:11
Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Jesus passed the test to give us salvation. We could never do that. But we can pass the little tests with the help of God's Word.

Mark was a 10 year old boy who never misbehaved or caused problems at school. But unfortunately he never made very good grades in spelling.

One day during a spelling test he was tempted to copy off of Jane, who always made straight "A's" in spelling. Even though Mark was a Christian, and knew that it was wrong to cheat, he did it anyway. The teacher saw Mark looking off of Jane's paper and was terribly shocked and disappointed because she had always admired him for his honesty. When it came time to collect the tests, the teacher noticed Mark did something very unusual. He bowed his head, and silently prayed and asked God to forgive him, and then he ripped up his paper. He decided to take a zero rather than turning in a paper in which he had cheated on.

The teacher called Mark up to her desk and said, "I was watching you, Mark, and I want you to know that I'm very proud of you for what you just did. Today you really passed a much greater examination than your spelling test.!"

Jesus passed for us the eternal test. For us, we may get to close to the edge and fall into temptation. But returning to God's forgiveness reveals exactly what Jesus did for us. He passed the test.

Knowing this our anxiety can melt away. We are forgiven, we are restored, and we have eternal life. It is crazy considering all the wrong choices we have made, we don't deserve it, but the reality is that in God's eyes we pass the test too!

