

Sunday, October 25, 2020

Psalm 91 | I Thessalonians 2:1-80 | Matthew 22:34-46

### Tested in Life

Do you remember in school when the teacher would be introducing new concepts in math, pointing out a significant date in history or even breaking down a sentence in French when someone in the class would ask will this be on the test? When we think of learning in school or any academic setting, we might remember that tests would occur every two or three weeks on materials learned in a particular unit, on a certain book read or with foundational concepts. Tests were and are the primary means of finding out whether the student understands the materials. With these kinds of tests, there is always a grade resulting and what these might mean. I understand that or I don't know this. These tests result in our intellectual self and what we understand.

Sure we know that there are other tests but those usually relate to the physical self for which you cannot study per se but can do things to prevent problems later on. Blood tests reveal much information about the health of one's body. Eye or vision tests alert us to what level one might need glasses to see better. But when we think of these tests—there is no studying required yet the results do make a difference in what occurs next—treatments, medicines administered or prescriptions.

We may also undergo other kinds of testing which helps us to understand our emotions and even our mental state. When was the last time you really laughed with another person? A really good joke was shared and it was a good joke? What about crying? When was the last time you cried out loud? Why? This pandemic has caused many people to feel different emotions and even lead to some mental concerns to arise and question what normal is and whether we will ever experience normal again. These are different kinds of tests but one not mentioned is whether you have had a spiritual test lately?

Being tested spiritually means asking yourself if your relationship with God is ok. Ok in the sense that there is a relationship and you talk with God, experience the Spirit and remember Jesus' teachings every day. Maybe the spirit in you has not met or experienced God's abounding love or maybe in this moment you need to be spiritually lifted up by God's Spirit to know that you are loved unconditionally by Him and that you are all right!

Jesus was tested in his ministry in different ways. He had people question who he was when he performed miracles. He had people asking why he spoke in stories or parables because he did not do what other prophets had done. He also had people test him with questions which seemed to have a no win answer- like the lawfulness of paying taxes and the one shared today- which is the greatest commandment. These questions seemed to ask Jesus to do the impossible for the sake of Gods kingdom. He did not want to divide the people and so in his typical fashion he returned this question to another. How many times have you done this? Not answering right away, or asking for clarification of what is expected but coming up with a different solution with the least number of problems. This is also being tested.

Jesus was asked which of the commandments is the greatest which in itself is not a great question as it asks one to respond to either living with faith in God or betraying people. The 10 commandments are such that they focus on God and our relationship with Him and how people are to relate to others. So for Jesus to answer none of them, and then clarify his statement with a newer approach to love and relationships with God and others is a great answer. He states that the greatest commandment is to love God, love others as you love yourself. This means that for Jesus the question is answered in the unexpected way of not picking from the top ten, but how we each relate to God and other people. This is known as the greatest commandment and an answer to the test of how to fully live.

Our world is anxiously waiting for a vaccine for covid19. In countries around the world researchers are doing test after test and trial after trial to see what can be presented to help people around the world to stop the spread of this virus which has led to thousands of deaths and sickness for many. This pandemic has also caused people to feel down, alone, and questioning life's purpose. But there have also been new teachings and opportunities emerge which have lead people to do new things with technology and to think about the rights and privileges of others.

Right now we need God who is ageless and active to spur us into high gear to save us from hurting ourselves and others. Are we being tested? Are we seeing a new age ready to be birthed in the next 2-3 years? Are we seeking answers to things we never thought possible? How will we respond? How might we act? Will it matter or will we just walk away without trying to do something different and innovative?

Paul reminds the people in Thessalonica why he Silvanus and Timothy went there and why it was so important. As they shared Jesus' story they had risked a lot because not everyone

believed or wanted to hear about Jesus as the Saviour. Those who believed became dear to them because they grew in their faith and were still learning how to live and love others in the way of Christ.

As we consider 2020 – maybe people want to say it is a year we should forget but it is still ongoing. Vision 2020 was the theme I picked because when one is tested for good vision, 20/20 indicates all things are clear. Yet this year has been far from clear in politics, in climate change, in international politics, global economy and world health. Nationally there has recently been tests for confidence in our government leaders for past actions, and provincially the economy is striving to move forward. Locally construction seems to move forward with something happening on many streets. But what is unclear is what is in the hearts of people? Sincism, heartache, even thoughts of depression have arisen because what calls us to be human—caring for others in our social circles has been stopped or modified. Are we being tested by God? Maybe- God is testing us to see if what is important will rise to the top in our hearts and minds and our willingness to let the excess will go away. And what is important—the greatest commandment—keeping it very simple: Love God, Love people! The world is changing for both good and bad and to change the world we need to do this each and every day.

So what are we to do when we cannot connect as easily with people? What are you doing to grow in faith and to love God? heart, soul and mind? We are to read the Bible, to pray regularly, to forgive others, to deny self and to reject worldliness or secularization. These are things we can do even now.

We will be tested for all things throughout life—physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. The greatest commandments call us to love God and love people. In these too we will be tested but because we have faith and trust God, God will see us and encourage us in all times. This is God's promise to us. He will never leave. Thanks be to God.

**PRAYER:** Gracious God we praise you that what we are called to do seems to simple-love you and others yet it is so difficult when people have various ways of what this means. Guide and lead us we pray so that we might see your vision with clear eyes and hearts that are filled with hope. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.