

Temptation: Will You Pass the Test?

Matthew 4:1-11

My brothers and sisters;

Whatever you do in life requires that a test be taken in today's highly technological environment. In life there comes a moment when you have to take a test or pass an examination of some sort, and the results of that test determines whether or not you can continue along the path you're following whether for life skills or a career.

The challenges of taking test starts very early in our lives. Some of these challenges are as early as kindergarten, others in junior high and finally high school, where you can take the "Life Skills Test," to see if you can graduate.

But all through life there are test and exams, that determine, if you can pass on to the next grade or level of life, there are the SAT's, Act's and THEA's that determine if you can go to the College University of your choice.

My brothers and sisters,

There is a test required for any profession or vocation you may want to pursue. Whether you want to be a nurse, a policeman, a barber, a doctor or a teacher, there comes a moment when you must take a test before you can go further.

If you even want to be a plumber, a beautician, a lawyer, or an electrician, you must have a license to do so. Many people are not doing what they really wanted to do in life because they may have failed a test, related to their chosen profession or craft.

There are many kinds of test and exams that you take over the course of your lives, and if you do not pass them there are many things that you are locked out of or prevented from doing. You can not get a legal drivers license until you pass the written part of the exam, no matter how well you can drive. We all know what will happen without that piece of paper, if you drive anyway, you may go to jail or get a ticket for driving without a license which can be a huge fine.

I have had to pass a variety of tests to proceed with my career goals. One such test was as a sophomore that would allow me to go into education for my undergrad major. Another was the Q and A in Graduate school in order to finish up the Master's degree and finally to make above 1250, on the National Teachers Exam in order to get a better certification in education.

My brothers and sisters,

I even had to pass another kind of exam when I met a young lady and went home with her to meet her parents for the first time. One wrong answer would have been my last answer and out the door for me. Do I have any witnesses?

It does not matter what you do for a living or what you are aspiring to do some day, it is almost a certainty that there are some exams and test you will have to pass before you can proceed down the road.

However my brothers and sisters, it is important to note that there are two different types of test we will have been called upon to pass as we move through this world. One of these tests is to measure the content of our knowledge; and the other is to measure the content of our character, which we call a test of the heart.

Sometime the test we face will have to do with knowledge and information, and at other times it will deal with our character and moral convictions. To put it another way, some exams are designed to find

out what we know, and others just as important are the exams to find out, “who we are?”

So my brothers and sisters, here at church we talk about two words that are not always defined, but sound almost alike and they test us in two very different areas of life. One of these words is aptitude; which points to knowledge and what a person knows how to do. Aptitude is a skill of the hands and or the head, it is the God given ability.

The other word is attitude; which points to who you are as a person. How well you get along with other people. How you can be trusted on the job without constant supervision. Will you steal, lie or miss work regularly? Will you be on time each day, ready to work? Anyone who has held down a job for more than a year knows that you are being tested in ways that are formal as well as informal about aptitude (what you can do) and attitude (who you are as a person).

My brothers and sisters,

I want to take this issue of having to pass a test to another level as we look at and apply all of it to Jesus as he is being tested by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11. This story occurs at a very critical time in the life of Christ Jesus and after his baptism, in the river Jordan by John the Baptist, immediately before he began his public ministry of preaching and healing.

As we look we see that Jesus had just experienced the most glorious joyful and exultant moment possible for a human being as the voice of God declared from heaven, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) Jesus had seen the heavens open and he saw the dove descending and resting upon his shoulder as a sign of his ordination and consecration for his ministry. But he did not move from that moment directly into his ministry in Galilee. First he “WAS led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.” (Matthew 4-1)

My brothers and sisters, it was as if the Holy Spirit was saying to Jesus that even he could not proceed with his career, his divine calling, or his life saving ministry until he took and passed a test of both aptitude and attitude, that is, how much he knew and what kind of person he really was.

Let me first talk to you about the attitude test that Jesus had to pass, or that Satan used to find out what kind of person that Jesus really was. Because after having fasted and being without water for 40 days Satan tested the character of Jesus in three ways for three more days for a total of forty-three days in all. Amen, thank God! What a mighty awesome God we serve.

This first test is a physical one, because he figured that Jesus was hungry, so he says, “Why don’t you turn these rocks into bread. The second test is psychological and one that involves humility; “Why don’t you jump from this temple and make God dispatch angels to catch you before you fall and kill yourself on the rocks below.”

And finally, Satan tests Jesus over proper religious practices that involved honoring nothing more than how you honor God. The first commandment given to Moses by God is, “You shall have no other gods before me.” That was the test Jesus faced when Satan said to him, “bow down and worship me and I will give you all the wealth of the world.”

My brothers and sisters,

When we look at these three areas of testing for Jesus, we must recognize that they are the same ones that Satan will use when he comes to test us too. The only difference is that he may not have to use but one of them on us, remember that he is stronger than we are; that he still has all of the power given to his station by God. But we have Jesus on our side. Amen!

However, the first test that we will have to endure is what we’re willing to do to satisfy some physical need that we experience. Would we be willing to steal, to lie, to cheat, or practice some form of discrimination or persecution if we thought it would help us meet some urgent physical need?

One easy way to test our character as followers of Jesus Christ involves the things that we will not do no matter how much it might benefit us if we did. Character involves the restraints and the restrictions that we impose on our own behavior as we seek to be faithful to God.

The moral things like we will not steal in order to get ahead, because the Bible says, “You shall not steal”, We will not condone discrimination, bigotry or exploitation of any kind, because the Bible says, “you shall love your neighbor as your self,” We will not engage in adultery ,or any other form of illicit sexual activity in order to satisfy some burning, lustful passion within us because the Bible clearly speaks against such conduct no matter how “good” it may feel or how “satisfying” it may seem. We must remember that Satan wants to test us at the level of our hunger for the pleasures of the world, because he wants to find out what kind of people we are. Yes, it is an attitude test!

The second test will involve what we are willing to do in order to make God prove Himself to us. In this second test you and I will assign a task that God must pass in order for us to believe that He is really there. We say things like this, “If you are really God then meet my need for a job, some money or even a spouse.

We put God to the test by asking him to do what ever it is that we ask God or perhaps even tell God, what to do in order for us to continue to believe in Him “Lord ,I know that you can heal me so do it!” “Lord, I know that you can give me this blessing that I desire, so do it!” Lord, I know you can answer this prayer, so do it!” We make demands, not request rapped in humility and love.

The devil is always testing our attitude to see what kind of people we are. He is always trying to find out if there is anything you would not do for a few bucks or if you thought you could earn some money in the process, or in certain situation lose some money. You make request, not love offerings, where you give yourselves to God, at no cost, just love, not asking for anything in return.

My brothers and sisters,

We need to learn to come before God like Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane . There was something that Jesus desperately and urgently wanted God to do for him, “Father, let this cup pass from me.” (Matthew 26:39) Jesus knew that unless something happened, He would soon be handed over to His enemies who would condemn him to death by the cruel process of crucifixion; being nailed to a cross and left to die from exposure, asphyxiation, horrendous physical pain and other physical trauma.

But, my brothers and sisters, even in the knowledge of inevitability and the prospects of death Jesus did not put God to the test, He did not tell God to do something as a way of proving that God was for real. After He told God what He wanted, He ended His prayer by remaining Himself that what He wanted was not the most important thing .He ended His prayer with the ultimate words of humility of one’s self and the ultimate exaltation of God; “not my will but your will be done .”

Whatever it is you may be asking from God, remember that Satan is testing you to find out whether you are willing and able to end your prayer by saying these words of Jesus; “not my will but thy will be done”.

In the third test we will surely face some day involves whether there is anything in this world that comes to mean more to us than our relationship and obedience to God. Because Satan told Jesus that he would give Him the world if Jesus would only bow down and worship him.

My brothers and sisters,

Satan will tell us the same thing; you can have it all, if you just turn your back on God and model your life after Snoop Dog, whose musical lyrics degrade and debase women. Maybe you can also model your life after Oprah Winfrey, who has been living with Steadman for many years out of wedlock. Maybe you can have a baby out of wedlock like Halle Berry.

Yes, why don't you just let them be your role models, as well as any other television or movie star that ridicules marital vows, and that the gods of popular culture are honoring and adoring. Never mind trusting and believing that God will provide for your needs; worship the gods of this world and trust them to provide the things you need.

My brothers and sisters life is a series of attitude test designed to find out what kind of person you are. You will be tested at the highest level of physical pleasure and desires. You will be tested at the level of placing God's will above your own. And you will be tested at the level of whether you will ever love anyone else or anything else more than you love and revere God.

But, let me now turn from the matter of attitude test to the matter of aptitude test, and suggest that Jesus passed that exam as well. In fact the reason He may have passed the character test of attitude is because He was able to pass the knowledge exam of aptitude. Every time Satan tested the character of Jesus, Satan was met with an answer from scripture. When Satan tested Jesus on meeting physical needs, Jesus passed that test by saying to Satan, "It is written that man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God."

He passed test by not giving God an assignment that had to be gone to prove to him that God was real. He passed the test by telling Satan, "You shall not put the Lord your God to a test." And finally my brothers and sister, He passed the test of not allowing anything of this world to become more important to him than His relationship and obedience to the teachings of God by declaring to Satan, "You shall worship the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul and spirit and serve only Him."

The phrase, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." comes from Deuteronomy 8:3. The phrase, "Do not put the Lord your God to a test," comes from Deuteronomy 6:16. And the phrase, "worship the Lord your God and serve only Him", comes from Deuteronomy 6:18.

My brothers and sisters,

Even in a state of exhaustion and physically weakened from lose of food and water we see that Jesus is still able to ward off Satan by using the scripture taught by the Old Testament prophets. He knew the Bible well enough to quote it from memory, using Psalms 119:11 that says "Your word have I hidden in my heart so I will not sin against you." This is the test that we need to pass as well as to know the Bible so well that its lessons and teachings will come rushing to our minds every time that Satan tries to lead us into temptation.

I like the fact that Jesus did not have to flip through the pages of the Bible so He could read the part that he needed in that moment. He did not need to have the Bible in his hand, because He had the Words of God in his head and in his heart. He did not have to turn to the index or table of contents, because he did not know which page to turn too. The words flowed out of him like water from a fountain. He could pass the attitude test of character because He could pass the aptitude test of knowledge.

And I know that one day you and I will have to be able to pass these same tests ourselves. Let me make one point as plainly as I can, there is nothing you can do to keep yourself from being tested or tempted by Satan. In one way or another, sooner or later, all of us will have to face and attempt to pass the test of temptation. Either in the form of physical passions, impatience that leads us to make God prove himself to us, or the possibility of being more impressed and obedient to some other person or ideology than you are to God.

But, my brothers and sisters, when our attitude or our character is tested, it will be our aptitude or our knowledge of and faith in the word of God that will see us through and help us to pass the test.

That is why it was important for Jesus to pass the test of attitude and aptitude. Because nothing

less than the power of sin was hanging in the balance. Remember that in the Garden of Eden sin crept in and took control of the human family because Adam and Eve failed both of these exams when they were tested by Satan.

They failed the attitude test of character when they ate from the one tree in the Garden that God told them to avoid. They failed the aptitude test of knowledge, because it was clear from the story that they knew perfectly well what God had said. However, having the words of God ringing in their ears, those words did not have enough power to restrain their behavior.

My brother and sisters,

Two portions of scripture come to mind now in relation ship to this message, 1 Corinthians 15:22 that says, "For as in Adam all died, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." The sin that gripped us like a vice came because one man failed his test. That grip was finally broken when another man came along and faced that same test but passed it with flying colors.

We can live free from the power of sin and Satan. We cannot avoid being tempted, but we can avoid giving in to those temptations by the power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, who will equip us with the right attitude and the right aptitude.

And now for my last point, In Hebrews 4:15 we read, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Every temptation you have felt, Jesus Christ also felt. Every passion that ever burned within you, burned in Him too. He knows what it is like to live with the devil on your tail, because that was His experience as well.

But here is the one big difference, He was tempted but did not yield; no he did not sin. He had the power to hold out. He had the knowledge to resist. He has the strength to stand firm, He had the character to overcome the devil. And if we just turn to Him and put our faith and trust in Him, He will held us accomplish the same thing and pass the test of time. The test of attitude and aptitude.

WE need to know that these traces helped Jesus over come sin, death and Satan.