

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #12

“The Blessed Test”

Introduction

Tonight we will conclude our teaching series on “The Purpose of Testing”.
We have learned 2 lessons:

- Testing, trials, troubles and tribulations are unavoidable
- But God has a purpose for every test He allows into our lives.

Review

We have been studying the prophetic pattern of Christian salvation revealed in God’s redemption of Israel...

Out of Egypt-Through the Wilderness-Into the Land

God saves us “out of Egypt” (the world system) to take us “into a (Promised) Land; but in between is a wilderness...

What is the Wilderness?

- A place of *transition*
- A place of *preparation*
- A place of *education*

The Purpose of the Wilderness

The wilderness is where God brings us to the end of ourselves; the school where we learn to be totally dependent upon God.

God led His people into the wilderness; where they ran out of water; ran out of food; then, when they came to the end of themselves and their own strength, God provided all they needed.

In the wilderness God tested His people when they had nothing; no land, no houses, no crops...nothing. All to teach them to trust only in God, not in themselves.

But when they entered the Promised Land, there would be a different kind of test awaiting them..

“The Blessed Test”

Our faith is not only tested when we are in the Wilderness of lack, but even more so in the Promised Land of prosperity.

There is an abundance of “prosperity preaching” in the Body of Christ-and the Bible does say “the Lord has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant (Psalm 35:27). But there is very little teaching on the perils of prosperity.

F.B. Meyer

“It is harder to walk with God in the sunshine of success than in the nipping frosts of failure. When Paul said, ‘I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound,’ he put the hardest last.”

It’s easier to stay close to God when we are abased than when we abound.
And it may surprise you to know that...

The Bible teaches that the more God prospers us the more likely we are to forget Him!

I. The “Blessed Test”

A. The Book of Deuteronomy: Preparing for the Promised Land

1. The setting of the Book of Deuteronomy:

- After 400 years, God brought His people out of Egyptian bondage
- For 40 years He has led them (and fed them) in the testings of the wilderness
- Now they are poised at the Jordan River; they are about to leave the wilderness and enter into the Promised Land of prosperity and blessing

2. The entire Book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ final message to the nation; Chapter 8 is a basically a warning:

Deuteronomy 8:1

“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers.

- To live, multiply and possess the Land is conditional upon obedience!

- Remember the testings in the wilderness

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna...that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

- Remember the wilderness is the place where God brings us to the end of ourselves; He allows us to run out of all our resources so we can learn to totally depend upon Him. Then He warns us...

Deuteronomy 8:6

Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

- Keep His commandments
- Walk in His ways
- Fear Him
- Remember the lessons of lack. Why? Because His is bringing you into a place of prosperity!

Deuteronomy 8:7-8

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;

Deuteronomy 8:9-10

A land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

- The testings in the wilderness were tests of LACK: lack of food, water, living in tents.

- But the testings in the Land will be tests of being blessed; tests that will come with prosperity and abundance.
- What is this “blessed test”?

Excerpt from Deuteronomy 8:11-14

Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God...when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up and you forget the Lord your God...

Charles Spurgeon

Whenever we see the word "Beware" in the Bible, we may be sure that there is something to beware of. The point here to note is, that our times of prosperity are times of danger. I remember that Mr. Whitefield once asked the prayers of the congregation "for a young gentleman in very dangerous circumstances," for he had just come into a fortune of £5,000. Then is the time when prayer is needed even more than in seasons of depression and of loss.

- How many ministers have fallen when their ministries were at the heights?
- Notice God does not forbid us the very prosperity He Himself provides; but He warns of its dangers.

Charles Spurgeon

“See, the Lord does not forbid his people to build a house, or to eat and to enjoy what he gives them; but he does charge them not to forget the God who gave them these mercies, nor to forget where they used to be in slavery.”

- The next verses describe what Matthew Henry called “the temptations of a prosperous condition”.

Deuteronomy 8:13-17 (Excerpt)

When all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, a thirsty land where there was no water; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end — then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

C.H. Mackintosh

“There is great danger of our resting in the mercies, blessings and benefits which flow, in such rich profusion, from our Father's loving heart and liberal hand. We are prone to rest in these things and allow them to come between our hearts and the Lord and thus they become a snare to us.”

- In the wilderness, the test was not having enough; but in the Land, the test will be having so much that we forget God that all our blessings come from God.

Deuteronomy 8:18-20

"And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God.

- The warning is: Remember God. Because if you forget Him you will follow other gods!

Matthew Henry

“Observe how he describes the sin; it is forgetting God, and then worshipping other gods. Once the affections are displaced from God, they will soon be misplaced upon lying vanities.”

- And this is exactly what happened to Israel.

B. Israel's Evil Report

1. A careful study of the history of Israel in the Old Testament clearly reveals how the nation repeatedly failed the “Blessed Test”. For example...

The Biblical Illustrator

Read the entire Book of Judges, and you will find it the continuous repetition of the same sequence of events. When the Israelites had gone across Jordan and tasted the milk and the honey and were full, they stopped blessing God, just as Moses told them not to do. Then the Lord sent in upon them an

invasion of heathen nations, who ground them, and trampled upon them, and devoured them till they were willing to cry unto the Lord and acknowledge Him again.

2. This is what God said to the prophet Hosea:

Hosea 10:1 (NLT)

How prosperous Israel is—a luxuriant vine loaded with fruit. But the richer the people get, the more pagan altars they build. The more bountiful their harvests, the more beautiful their sacred pillars.

Hosea 13:6 (NIV)

When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot Me.

- a. The richer we get the more danger we're in.
- b. If we forget God we will fall into idolatry!

Matthew Henry

“They multiplied their altars and image. The more bountiful God's providence was to them the more prodigal they became in serving their idols. It is a great affront to God, and an abuse of his goodness, when the more mercies we receive from him the more sins we commit against him, and when the more wealth men have the more mischief they do. Should not we be thus abundant in the service of our God, as they were in the service of their idols? As we find our estates increasing, we should proportion ably abound the more in works of holiness and charity.”

3. When Job was suffering his great test he recognized this danger:

Job 31:24-28

"If I have made gold my hope, Or said to fine gold, 'You are my confidence'; If I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gained much; if I have observed the sun when it shines, or the moon moving in brightness, so that my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand; this also would be an iniquity deserving of judgment, for I would have denied God who is above.”

4. The “Blessed Test” is real! Especially in a prosperous nation like America!

C. The Blessed Test in the New Testament

1. Jesus spoke of the “Blessed Test” in a warning from the Sermon on the Mount:

Matt 6:24

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

a. The term **MAMMON** is from a Chaldean word that means “wealth” or “riches”.

b. Jesus personifies it as rival of God! Because money promises what only God can truly provide: Security, freedom, power, and significance. God is testing if we will love and trust money or love and trust God.

2. Then there is the story of the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus seeking eternal life. Jesus said, “Keep the commandments”.

Matthew 19:20-26

20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

a. Keeping the commandments can't get you to heaven if you can't pass the “Blessed Test”!

Matthew 19:23-24

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

b. This is an astonishing statement you never hear from some of the prosperity preachers; even the disciples were upset.

Matthew 19:25-26

When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

3. It is possible to prosper and make it to heaven if we can pass the Blessed Test.

II. How Can We Pass the Blessed Test?

A. How We Handle Our Money

1. The blessed test boils down to one thing: how we handle our money.

Luke 16:10-12 (NET Bible)

"The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and the one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. 11 If then you haven't been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches?

a. Notice that Jesus refers to money as "least"! It does not compare with "true riches"; but how we handle it matters!

b. Then He adds this:

And if you have not been trustworthy with another man's property who will give you property of your own?

(NKJV-"faithful in that which is another man's)

2. What money do we have that is "another man's"? He is talking about the tithe; the 1st 10% of all our income. It is not ours. It belongs to the Lord!

Leviticus 27:30 NIV

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.

Leviticus 27:30-31 NLT

"One tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy.

3. The first 10% of all our increase or income does not belong to us! It belongs to the Lord!

Malachi 3:8-9

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

a. Withholding the tithe is “robbing” from God; because it is not ours, it is His.

Malachi 3:10

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

4. When we honor the Lord with the 1st 10% it demonstrates that our trust is in God, not money. The tithe is holy to the Lord; and it sanctifies the rest.

Malachi 3:11-12

"And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," says the Lord of hosts; and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts.

5. We find the same thing in the words of Solomon:

Proverbs 3:9-10

Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

a. The tithe is the key to passing the “Blessed Test”: What will I do with it?

The Blessed Test

Will I give God my first and my best so He can bless the rest?

III. Conclusion

A. Review

The Blessed Test

Our faith in God is tested not only in the Wilderness of lack, but even more so in the Promised Land of prosperity.

The Biblical Illustrator

We know how it works with children sometimes, whose parents, the more they do for their children the less are they regarded and loved by their children. This was the point of Moses anxiety in our text. This fact of the corrupting power of prosperity is a practical and a serious one.

The Biblical Illustrator

Prosperity is dangerous, dangerous for a man, a family, a country; it makes men indifferent, infidel, atheistic, if not in their creed, at least in their life. The more God gives us, the less, as a rule, we have of God. It is easy to be ruined by success. God gets eclipsed by His own bestowments.

But God has set up a system to keep us safe from falling into sin; how we handle our money; how we handle God's tithe. We pass the Blessed Test when we honor God in our giving.

Don't dismiss the seriousness of the Blessed Test!

1 Timothy 6:10-13

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Fox News

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The Supreme Court rejected an atheist case Monday to remove "In God We Trust," the national motto, from all coins and currency from the Department of Treasury.