

7-21-24

He Passed the Test!

John 6: 1 – 14

What test have you taken today?

What are you talking about Pastor? I don't remember taking a test today.

Sure you did. It may not have been with pen and paper or on a computer, but you've taken a test. And congratulations, maybe you even passed it with flying colors.

Whether we realize it or not, we're tested every day:

We get tested on things like ...

Will I be kind to a family member who really annoys me?

Will I wake up and begin my day with a positive attitude or will I bite the head off the first person I see?

Will I be a servant, or will I wait around to be served?

Will I tend to my responsibilities or find ways to squander away the time?

Will I seek only to feed my flesh, or will I look to the needs of others?

Will I look to the needs of my soul?

Will I look to God for strength and guidance, or will I just rely on my coffee and bagel to see me through?

Are the messages on my phone more important than God's Word?

Will I succumb to the temptations of the world that flash before me like signs along the freeway or will I be strong and resolve to flee temptation?

How will I react to the news of the day?

Do I see the world as totally out of control, causing me to take inventory of my underground bunker?

Do I believe that God is still in control?

Personally, I don't like to be tested, especially in the things that test my moral compass or my strength of character because I'm usually found wanting.

When I was teaching last year, I had to give tests regularly to my students. It was my practice to read through the tests and take the tests myself beforehand. This way I could be confident that I wasn't requiring the students to know something I hadn't taught them.

But it got me thinking ... Was I testing the students' knowledge of the material or just my ability to transfer the material? Who knows?

But this is what the school expected, and sometimes you just have to work within the system.

Jesus tried to work within the Jewish system, and in the process, he sometimes distributed a test to his disciples. He did this in John 6 where the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is recorded. This miracle is recorded in all four Gospels.

How did they do?

Did they pass or fail?

Would they beg for extra credit?

We know Jesus was testing them because the scriptures say just this in verse 5 and 6: *“When Jesus looked and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.”*

Have you ever wondered why God tests us?

Is it because He’s bored and wants to see us squirm once in a while?

You know the answer, but I’ll remind you what the scriptures say in case you’ve forgotten – and we do tend to forget especially when we’re in the middle of the test, busily trying to survive the test.

Most importantly, we need to remember and accept the fact that God’s testing of us and our faith is primarily for our benefit.

The Apostle Peter talks about this in chapter 1 of his letter saying, *“you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*

The key here is that God wants us to have a genuine faith because a genuine, real, authentic faith in Christ guarantees the salvation of our souls! And what could possibly be more important than this?

God loves us so much that he is willing to put us through all sorts of tests to ensure that our salvation is a lock – that when he returns, there will be no question as to what team we’re playing for.

James is on the same page as Peter when he writes, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

The finished work of our faith is the salvation of our souls and all our praise directed toward God.

So again, I say the testing of our faith is ultimately for our benefit. If we persevere, salvation and eternal life with God is ours!

What could possibly be a greater reward?

And of course, how can we forget what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:3? *“We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”*

Again, the tests that God allows to come into our lives, have, as their purpose, the preparation of our souls for salvation and for the heavenly life that is to be ours in the age to come!

God’s testing is for our benefit.

It’s this truth that makes the tests bearable.

So, in the feeding of the five thousand, we see that Philip is tested first.

Now you may think that his test was not a very rigorous or significant one. As a matter of fact, it seems like a very subtle one, almost like a pop quiz: It came in the form of a simple question from Jesus.

I paraphrase: Hey Philip, look at this huge crowd. I wonder how much food it would take to feed all of them.

To me, it's curious that Jesus even raised the prospect of feeding the masses, because when you think about it, it was neither Jesus' nor the disciples' responsibility to feed the multitude.

The crowd followed Jesus on their own accord. If they didn't bring enough food along, it was their own fault.

But isn't this exactly how we treat others much of the time?

We see someone who's in need of support - maybe it's clothes or food or transportation or emotional support - and we surmise that they probably got into this predicament because of poor planning or poor decision - making, so we're reluctant to help.

But Jesus doesn't go there.

He doesn't see it that way. He just sees people whom He can help.

We say to ourselves and maybe to them... Let this be a good lesson for you. Maybe next time you'll remember and be better prepared. You see that I can help you, but I will withhold my help so that you will learn. In this way, we justify our inaction.

I'm not saying that experience isn't a good teacher. I'm just saying that sometimes there are bigger fish to fry, and here we find Jesus in the kitchen just getting warmed up.

So Philip, even though feeding all these people isn't really in our job description, I'm asking you ... how are we going to do it? How are we going to pull off this monumental task?

I can't tell you how many times I've told a young person to do something or pick something up, and the first thing out of their mouth was... "that's not mine, or I didn't put it there."

Perhaps this is how Philip felt. Hey, I never invited these people out here. Why should I concern myself with the problem of feeding them?

But yet, Philip was quick to reply: Gee Boss, your annual salary as a rabbi wouldn't be enough to make sure everyone got at least one bite!

In other words, Philip assessed the situation before him and deemed it hopeless. Maybe it was his way of saying ... I can't get involved. The problem is too overwhelming, and I just wouldn't know where to start.

Did Philip pass the test? Of course not.

How about us? How many times have we looked at this person or that situation and deemed it a hopeless situation?

And maybe to us it really wasn't hopeless. Rather it was just too sticky, too time-consuming, too complex, so we convinced ourselves that we have neither the time nor the energy to invest.

If we've ever thought this, then we too have failed God's test because to lose hope is to concede that God cannot or will not do what looks impossible.

Now, how about Andrew? Did he pass the test?

The biblical text says that Andrew pointed out to Jesus a boy who had five small barley loaves and two small fish.

Did Andrew bring the boy to Jesus?

Had he gone searching for food himself?

Or did the boy just happen to appear on the scene at the perfect time?

We're not told, so we don't know for sure, but what we do know is that Andrew doesn't like to sit on his hands and do nothing.

Remember what Andrew did shortly after he became a follower of Jesus? We can read about in John 1: 40 -42: *"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John the Baptist said concerning Jesus, 'Look the Lamb of God' and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah.' And he brought him to Jesus."*

Could Andrew have brought the boy to Jesus just as he had brought his brother to Jesus?

It seems very likely. And if he did, we certainly wouldn't be wrong in commending him for it.

But did he pass the test?

I'm not sure. Sure, he may have brought the boy to Jesus – and maybe this was enough – but his faith was still suspect.

I base this on what he says after he describes the boy's meager supplies of two small fish and five small barley loaves: *"but how far will they go among so many?"*

So, Philip didn't pass the Lord's test, because he saw the situation as impossible and hopeless.

Andrew didn't pass it either. His focus was only on their meager supplies.

The disciples were either focused on the enormity of the problem or the insufficiency of their supplies.

In both cases, as far as Andrew and Philip were concerned, God and his divine power and riches were not part of the equation.

And this is how we often operate:

Sometimes we just get overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem.

Other times our faith grows weak after we've taken inventory of our resources.

But the fatal flaw in both situations is that we've forgotten to factor in God and His desire to bless his people and glorify his name.

When we focus on God, then we too will pass the test.

So, who passed the test in John 6?

We know it wasn't Philip or Andrew.

Who then is left?

Obviously, but maybe it's not so obvious, it was the boy who turned his lunch over to Jesus.

Think about it for a minute. He carried with him five small barley loaves and 2 small fish - a nourishing, but not overly abundant meal for a youth with a high metabolism rate!

For all we know, his lunch had been lovingly packed for him by his mother earlier that morning. Maybe his mother was busy at home mending clothes or hauling water or preparing food and could not accompany her son to see Jesus, but she saw to it that her son would not go hungry on his adventure.

She may have even given him strict instructions to ration his meal conservatively over the course of the day so it would last him the entire trip.

We can only speculate, but can you begin to see the trust and faith necessary for this youngster to hand over his meal to his new-found friends, Jesus and his disciples?

Perhaps he hesitated and thought to himself, maybe I should hold back at least give 1 fish and a couple loaves. This way I can keep the rest in reserve and have a little bit left for the journey home.

Maybe I'll hide them in my pocket. They'll be none the wiser!

And besides, I'm hungry. If I give them my food, I may not have the strength to finish my journey.

Do you see how conflicted the little boy could have been?

I'm sure he witnessed others who were just as hungry as he was, and he would like to help, but this was **his** lunch. He was not obligated to share.

But he did.

And in the simple act of offering his lunch to Jesus, he found himself smack dab in the middle of one of the greatest miracles ever recorded.

Do you think that boy ever forgot what happened on that special day?

Do you think he shared that story just a few times to his children and grandchildren?

He passed the test of faith and God's people were fed, and they were blessed because they witnessed the power of God.

And God's name was praised.

What's your next test, and will you pass the test?

What do have that seems pretty much inconsequential, but in the hands of God becomes a miracle?

Passing the test means trusting God with your life and all the things that make up your life –

from the food you eat,

to the clothes you wear,

to the family and friends you have

the job you work at,

your vices and personality,

the way you're wired and your history

everything that makes you, you.

God wants all of you so you can be with Him forever.

The Bible says we must have faith as a little child when we come to him.

And when we do, let's offer him our lunch as well.

It shows we really do believe!

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurable more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” Eph. 3:20 -21