

Do You Pass the Test?

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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June 9, 2024

Text: Psalm 148 (responsive reading), John 13:31-35

Purpose: To draw people closer to the Lord and to “really” seek to Love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. To challenge people to glorify God with their lives, to love one another, and to determine in their hearts to remain unswervingly faithful.

Two mothers were talking about their sons. The first said, "My son is such a saint. He works hard, doesn't smoke, and he hasn't so much as looked at a woman in over two years."



The other woman said, "Well, my son is a saint himself. Not only has he not looked at a woman in over three years, but he hasn't touched a drop of liquor in all that time."



"My word," the first mother said. "You must be so proud."

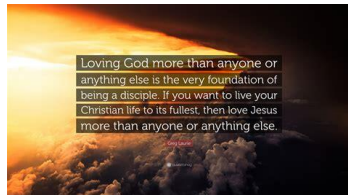
"I am," the second mother replied. "And when he's paroled next month, I'm going to throw him a big party."¹

I don't know if you have ever met someone that deeply impressed you and you have never forgotten who that person was, what they said, and how they lived.

About 11 years ago, while on a retreat with my Peer Learning Group, I met a man that deeply impressed me with his attitude toward his walk with the Lord. Sadly, he passed away in May 2015, but his words, his demeanor, his love for God resonated with me and I still remember his passion for the lost. Horace Ward had served in many different capacities throughout his life. He had planted churches, served with the North American Mission Board, served as a pastor, and started the Tar Roanoke Chaplaincy which focuses on prison ministry in and around the Rocky Mount area.



Horace touched on something that struck a profound spot in my soul. Over the course of a few hours, I saw the heart of someone that *sought to love God more*. I saw someone whose heart sought to please God by blessing God more. I heard from a man that was willing to forsake everything and follow the Holy Spirit's leading to seek and save the lost. His life's journey had led him into the prisons where people were locked away and forgotten.



Horace pointed out to us that it was there on the cross that God demonstrated His greatest love for us. It was there on that wondrous cross, where the blood of the Lamb of God was poured out as a sacrifice for us, that was the greatest demonstration of love.

When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain, I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Because of that great sacrifice on Calvary's hill, we should be completely revolutionized and transformed from the inside out. It is the heart the Lord is looking at, to see if we are true and sincere in our life and devotion to Him.



Because God first loved us, we in turn should love Him more. That is what Horace told me he wanted put on his tombstone. ***"He sought to love God more."*** What a great goal in life – to love the Creator more. To love our Redeemer more. To love our Sustainer more. To seek to have a heart that hungers for God. To seek to know Him more fully through the study of His word and in spending time in prayer. To genuinely love God.

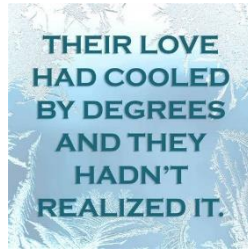
The question I asked myself as Horace was sharing his story with us was, **"Do I love God with that kind of intensity?"** My response was no, but my desire was to seek to have that kind of love for God grow within me.




Do you remember the encounter Simon Peter had with the Lord on the seashore, after Jesus' resurrection and before Jesus' ascension? Simon Peter was the one that made the great declaration of Jesus being the Christ. Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. Peter was also the one that denied Jesus three times the night of Jesus' betrayal.

Do you remember what Jesus asked Peter three times there on the seashore of the Sea of Galilee? He asked Peter, “*Do you love me? Do you really love me?*”

The heart of what Horace was telling us was that we need to fall in love with Jesus once again. Maybe you are like me and have simply taken Jesus’ love for granted and have moved on to other things. Our initial love for Jesus could be compared to the courtship of our spouses. It starts off strong and intense – but over time it becomes routine and taken for granted. We start out strong in our relationship with the Lord – we read the Bible, we attend all of the church functions, we read other books – but over time we don’t open our Bibles, we don’t attend worship regularly, we pass by books that could help us grow closer to the Lord.



 This morning, I want to ask you a question, “Do you pass the test?” Or are you simply going through the motions and saying, “I am doing fine?”

I am afraid many of us are like the person that showed up in court one day. This man entered the courtroom all banged up, bruised, and his arm in a cast. The judge looked at the man and asked him about his injuries.

He said, “Judge, I am in terrible condition. I have bruises, cuts, and even a broken arm.”

The judge said, “I don’t understand this. You told the officer at the scene of the accident that you were just fine.”



The man replied, “Well judge, let me explain. I was driving my pickup and pulling a trailer. In the back of that trailer was my old dog Shep as well as my mule. All of a sudden, an 18 wheeler sideswiped me and knocked me off the road. My pickup and trailer rolled over and over and we ended up at the bottom of the embankment.”

“The next thing I remember was a police officer picking his way through the wreckage. I saw him examine my mule and then he pulled out his pistol and shot the mule between the eyes. He then looked at my dog, Shep, and after examining him, the officer shot and killed him.”

“Then the officer came over to me and asked me how I was doing.”



“Your honor, even though I was all banged up and hurting, I told the officer I was just fine!”

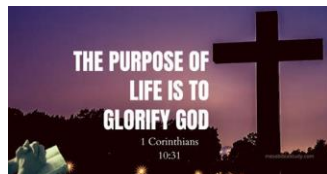
How many of us are simply going through the motions of life and saying, “I’m just fine!” When in fact, we may be beat up, scratched and bruised from the things that have happened to us in our life.

If I were to ask you about your spiritual life, you would probably say, “I’m just fine.” Could the root of our problem be that we are not loving God as we should? Could it also be that we are not loving others either?



Our passage of scripture in John 13:31-35 gets to the heart of the matter – love God and love one another. If we could simply do that and do it well, I believe we can with a sincere heart answer the question about how we are doing – with a resounding “Fine!” and really mean it.

Jesus is with his disciples there in the Upper Room. Judas has just left the room leaving Jesus with the other 11 disciples. Jesus begins to talk about what it really means to be a disciple.



I. Desire to Glorify God²

This discussion with His disciples brings us to the first mark of a follower of Jesus. It is the *desire to glorify God*. In verse 34 it says, “*Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.*”

Jesus is letting them know, that the upcoming crucifixion is the way Jesus will be glorified and the Lord will also be glorified in the process. It is a demonstration of Jesus’ love for us and God’s love for us. Jesus loved us so much that He willingly laid down His life for us and God loved us so much that He gave His one and only Son so that by believing in Him, we may have life.

As we tell others about the great love of God and the grace extended to us at Calvary, the Father and the Son are glorified. We should have a heart of praise for God. When we do that, we are glorifying God.

“Are we seeking to glorify ourselves or to glorify God?”

– That is the first test.

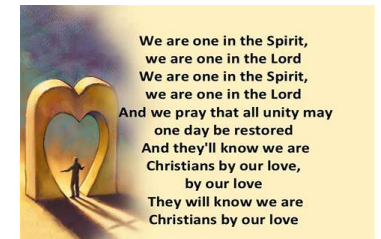
II. Unfailing Love for One Another



If we look at verse 34, we see the second mark of a disciple – *the unfailing love for one another*.

Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

In 1968, there was a spiritual song written by Peter R. Scholtes that captured this thought from John 13:35 so well:



We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, We are one in the Lord
And we pray that all unity, May one day be restored

Chorus:

And they'll know we are Christians,
By our love, By our love
Yes, they'll know we are Christians, By our love

We will walk with each other, We will walk hand in hand
We will walk with each other, We will walk hand in hand
And together we'll spread the news, That God is in our land.

Chorus

We will work with each other, We will work side by side
We will work with each other, We will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity, and save each man's pride

Chorus

All praise to the Father, From whom all things come
And all praise to Christ Jesus His only son,
And all praise to the Spirit, Who makes us one
Make us one, Lord!
Make us one, Lord!³



The scripture tells us that the mark of a Christian is our love for one another. Many churches are marred by their anger, frustration, and hurtful comments. As followers of Christ, we need to keep our focus on loving God and loving one another. Our love is not measured by our contributions to the church, or how many committees we serve on – it is measured by how we love.

Maybe we can demonstrate our love by giving food to the soup kitchen. Maybe it can be demonstrated by taking meals to shut-ins. Maybe it can be shown by going to someone that is in the hospital. Maybe we can demonstrate love by giving of ourselves to others so they can know the love of God.

How are you doing with this second test?
How are you doing in demonstrating your love for others?

III. Unwavering Loyalty to Jesus

The third mark of a disciple of Jesus is *unwavering loyalty to Jesus*.



Let's look at the life of Simon Peter for a moment to catch a glimpse of what Jesus is

trying to tell us about our dedication and resolve to follow Him.

In the passage of John 13:36-38, we see an exchange between Peter and Jesus.

“Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, where are you going?’

Jesus answered him, ‘Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.’

Peter said to Him, ‘Lord why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.’

Jesus answered him, ‘Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.’



Peter was quick to commit himself to doing something, but short on follow up.

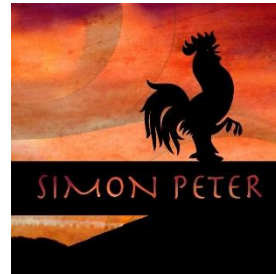
Peter proclaimed he would die with Jesus.

Peter stepped out on faith and walked on water.

Peter once offered to build three tabernacles to honor Jesus, Elisha, and Moses there on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Jesus even called upon Peter to pray with Him in the Garden on the night of Jesus' betrayal.

In each of these situations, Peter was strong on proclaiming his loyalty, but short on his follow through.



Peter denied Jesus three times that night.

Peter sank in the water when he took his eyes off Jesus.

Peter never built a tabernacle.

Peter went to sleep during that crucial hour.

I believe many of us are just like Peter – long on words but short on action. Willing to make grand proclamations yet lacking in follow through.

We follow Jesus at a distance. Peter followed Jesus the night of his betrayal at a distance and it resulted in him being swayed by the crowds and denying Jesus. We are somehow afraid to get too close. We are afraid of totally surrendering ourselves to Jesus – because of what He may ask us to do.

If we ever want to experience a relationship with the Lord, we need to be willing to go wherever He leads us.



A mother reported that her three-year-old son was following right up under her all day as she was doing her work around the house. Every time she turned around there the little boy was. When she was cleaning, he was right there. When she was doing the laundry, he was right there. When she was cooking something, the little boy was there. She accidentally stepped on him several times. Each time she tried to get

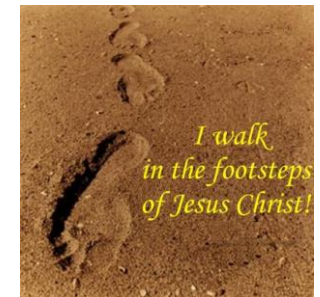
him to go and play with his toys. Each time the boy simply said, “That’s all right mommy, I’d rather be here with you.” The boy continued to say underfoot.

After stepping on him for the umpteenth time, in expiration said to him, “Why are you acting like this today?”

The boy said, “Well, Mommy, my Sunday school teacher told me to walk in Jesus’ footsteps. But I cannot see Him, so I’m walking in yours.”

How are you doing on this test this morning? Are you walking in the footsteps of Jesus?

- Are you seeking to glorify God more each day? Or are you seeking to glorify yourself?
- How are you doing loving others? Are you actively involved in doing things that demonstrate your love for one another?
- How are you doing when it comes to your steadfast dedication to the Lord no matter the cost? Are you following in the footsteps of Jesus?



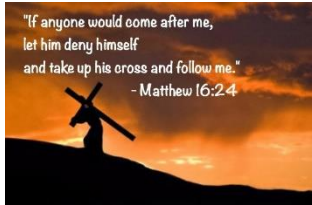
It doesn’t matter how much Christian themed jewelry you wear.

It doesn’t matter what kind of bumper sticker you have on your car.

The only thing that matters is how we love God and love others.



Peter may have started out poorly, but he finished well. He preached the great sermon on Pentecost. He led thousands to the Lord that day. He became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He even died crucified upside down as a witness to his faith in his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



The call to go deeper in our walk with the Lord is still available to us today. We may have started out poorly, but we can finish well. Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”*

May we be found seeking to love God more – and loving others as well.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹Mickey’s Funnies, A Son Funny, May 1, 2024

² Outline from a sermon by Melvin Newland, Can We Pass the Test

³ Lyrics from <http://www.elyrics.net>