

Testing God

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's faithfulness and promises, and warns against the sin of unbelief, which can lead to spiritual stagnation and a lack of faith.

Duration: 20:12

Scripture: Exodus 14:21-22, Psalm 95:7-11, Hebrews 3:8-13, Hebrews 3:15

Topics: "Testing"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the callousness that can come upon people when they take for granted the blessings and faithfulness of God. He highlights the incredible miracles that God performed for the Israelites, such as the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, and the provision of their needs. Despite witnessing these miracles, the Israelites still rebelled and tested God, leading to God's anger and their inability to enter His rest. The speaker warns Christians not to have a sinful and unbelieving heart that turns away from God, but instead encourages them to daily encourage one another and remain steadfast in their faith.

Transcript

When you're a farmer in Wisconsin, where they have a lot of dairy farms, Carol's family on her mother's side comes from there, and you buy a new John Deere tractor, you probably see it at a showroom or online catalog. It's got all the new bells and whistles for tractors. You're into agriculture.

It comes to you, and you just can't wait to try it out. How does this work? Is the engine stronger? How does it work uphill when the ground is uneven? How do those tires work and all of that? You try it out, and you try to find out, is it as good as they said it was? There's a new iPhone out, right? Oh, I could tell by that little yes that some of you are going, yeah, I want one. So then when people get a new phone, they're like, oh, I got to try this out.

I can't wait. And they spend hours just trying how fast is it and this and that. What are the advances? You know that happened to Israel? It's written about in the old, but I want to give you the Old Testament short rendition.

So as the Holy Spirit says today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. This is to Christians. This is a quote from the Old Testament.

As you did in the rebellion during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for 40 years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation. I said their hearts are always going astray and they have not known my ways.

So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall never enter my rest. See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another.

Pass a symbol and do it today. Encourage everyone daily as long as it's called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. The word there for when they tested and they tried the Lord, one of the words there is the Greek word that represents the testing of something to see if it has the value that it promised to have, like the tractor or like the new phone.

In other words, you get it, but you're not sure it's everything they said it would be. So you get it, you try it under different circumstances, and then you find out, is it good? Does it deliver what's promised? Or is it not so good? You go to a restaurant and everybody's telling you, oh, that's the best restaurant in the world. You got to go.

And when you go, but you don't go except with this thing. Is it as good? Let me order the food and eat it. Is it as good as everyone says? Now, this is what God says about the people of Israel, which was amazing.

And it shows and it warns us about a callousness that can come on us by taking granted the blessings and the faithfulness of God. When God brought them out of Egypt, he made a number of promises. I will never leave you.

I'm going to never let you go. I will supply what you need. And I mean, if you were in Egypt as a slave, as an Israelite slave, and you saw the 10 plagues hit Pharaoh, and you saw locusts everywhere, and then you saw the death of the firstborn on Passover night, and then you got to the Red Sea, and you're backed up against the wall, as it were.

And then God opens the Red Sea and push back the waters like he did just recently in that hurricane down in parts of Florida. The water went back more than a mile and people could walk where the water was. And if you saw all of that, wouldn't you think that you would believe? Wouldn't you think that whatever God said, you go, I'm down for that.

Listen, what I've seen God do. But did you know there's something pernicious about us humans that no matter what God does, no matter how many times he comes through, we tend to forget his faithfulness. And we worry and we fret when the new problem comes as if there's no God in heaven, and we're all going to die and fall in a black hole.

And this is what upset God about the Israelites. For 40 years, they watched every single morning, no matter where they were in that desert. They saw their breakfast supplied for them by God.

And then some, it was more than breakfast. The manna came down every single morning. It was waiting for them.

And this was a huge amount of food because there's a huge amount of Israelites. Some tell you a million, one and a quarter million. Others go more than 2 million.

And every single night they went to sleep, they had nothing to eat the next day. And God made sure they had nothing. And he said, just watch my faithfulness.

When you get up and go out, it'll be on the ground waiting for you. And there it was, not for a week, not for a month, not for a year, for 40 years, every day. When they needed water, what did God do? He even led them to places like Elim where there were springs.

But sometimes he let water come out of a rock. Moses struck the rock or spoke to the rock and out came water and it satisfied them. God's showing them, I got your back.

I love you. I'm gonna take care of you. I am Jehovah Jireh, your provider.

And he did it over and over again. And then when they needed meat at times, more solid sustenance, he sent the quail. They had quail, fried quail, boiled quail, roti, quail roti, quail patties.

They had every kind of quail. Until they couldn't take it anymore. Once again, God's showing that he's faithful.

But this is what triggered him getting upset. When he told them, go in the promised land, they said, no, the enemy's too big. We can't do it.

The walls are too high. We saw this place called Jericho. The spy said, big walls, big time walls.

We're not a fighting people. We're just, we were slaves. We have no history.

Of militarism. We can't do it. And then they said, you know what? We're gonna die here in the wilderness.

Let's go back to Egypt. After God had done all that, they said, I wanna go back. I wanna go back to my old way of life.

Because at least I had garlic, leeks, onions. That's what they said. I'm not making that up.

And this stirred God's heart. Like, what do I have to do? How many times do I have to do it to get you to trust me? So the Bible warns us as Christians, beware every day, encourage each other. Because the evil sin of unbelief can sneak up on all of us.

And instead of trusting, we worry. Instead of worshiping, we complain. Why? You don't know what I'm going through.

All right, I don't know what you're going through. But what has God already done for you? Everybody stop and look at me. Look back over the last 10 years of your life.

How many days, how many times has God come through for us? How many mornings has he woken us up? How many meals has he given us to eat? Come on, let's say amen to all of that. Amen. This is a very serious thing we learn.

You know, we have certain hierarchy of sins. This is really bad. That's bad.

This is bad. But the sin that provoked God here was not their drunkenness or their making idols, their pervasive unbelief. They wouldn't trust God, even though he showed them I'm everything I promised to be and then some.

Why do you worry? And I want to say that to me because I'm not going to be condescending. I want to say it to me and to you. Why do we worry? What are we afraid of? Hasn't God promised that he would never leave us nor forsake us? Tell me something.

When did he let you down? Could you tell me about it? When did he not wake you up in the morning and get you on your way? How many have had your backs up against the wall and had some real emergency and somehow God made a way and came through? Just lift your hand up high. I just want to give you this word of encouragement because the Bible tells me I'm supposed to do it. I want to remind you, God is not going to fail you.

Not one of you here. And if we worry and we fret and we get depressed and we're all negative and the glasses always have to empty, that is very grievous to God. Very grievous to God.

So you know what God said was, the people said, you know what? We're going to die in the wilderness. We'll never get there because of how hard it is. And Joshua and Caleb, the two spies full of faith said, no, no.

Look what God's already done. God is awesome. He's greater than all of the Amalekites and Canaanites and Jebusites and all that.

He's going to overcome all of them. And the people said, no, no. They had a pity party.

And you know, sometimes when you're full of unbelief, you think it's humility. It's not. It's unbelief.

And you're having a pity party and now you're a victim. How can you be a victim if Christ is in you? If he makes us more than conquerors, are you a conqueror? Are you a victim? Come on. How many want to be conquerors today? You can't be both.

Some of us have to get this victim spirit out of us and get the bearing of a conqueror. Why? Because we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. God is faithful.

And I just want to remind you of his track record in your life and in my life. God has been so good and he's telling me today, Jim, don't let anything sway you. Don't be afraid of anything.

I took care of the little things. I took care of the big things. Nothing's big to me and nothing's little because I love you all so much that anything that pertains to you gets my interest and gets my attention.

God's going to see you through. I just thought as I was worshiping God sitting next to Carol over there, way back when we first went in the ministry, this is two out of, I could tell you just so many, but I just thought of these. Maybe because I was sitting next to her.

So we were, just came to the Brooklyn Tabernacle, left the other church we were working at, which gave us a salary. And now we're in no man's land. My parents had given us some money.

So we had a little house in Maplewood, New Jersey, but that actually became problematic because now it costs more to commute and drive to Brooklyn. And we didn't have the money for that. So she got a second job.

I got a second job, but it was touch and go. It really was. And the offerings were just almost non-existent.

So I don't ever want my wife to panic. I don't share things with her that are possibly going to overwhelm her. We're all made differently.

One day I was, it was a Saturday and I'm just there and I look in the refrigerator and I'm going, wow, I got to get some food. And we already had Chrissy, my daughter. But I knew because I paid the bills, I don't have a whole lot of money to go down there and get food.

Maybe none of you have ever been in that situation. I didn't grow up that way. You know, my mom and dad were always blessed, but it is what it is.

So I'm thinking, oh God, help us. Doorbell rings. I go out and we had a little porch.

I opened the door and there's nobody there. It took me for a while to get to the door. There's nobody there, but I just see a car driving away.

And I look out and I go, what was that? Then my attention is drawn to my left and leaning against the house are six huge bags of groceries. I learned later, a sister in the church, God just spoke to her and said, go buy groceries for the pastor and his wife and drive them out to New Jersey from Brooklyn and leave them there. With a track record like that, why should I ever worry? Come on, can we say amen to that? How many of you have your own testimony? Say aloud, amen.

How God came through. Just one more. This is two, three years ago.

So we're paying all our bills. We're paying our mortgage. It was a big amount, but we're paying it and never late, never delayed payment.

All the bills are paid and we're getting to the end of the year and it's like December 10th. And the CFO then is meeting with us pastors and we're all together. And there's, I'm saying, how are we finishing the year? How does it look CFO? And he said, you know what? We're in good shape.

The bills are paid, but you know what? The lender that we had then is, looks at ratios and I don't know from finance really. So the ratio is like, you're paying all your bills, but they have another factor in there. Like what's your cashflow cash on hand and what are you ending with? Even though you're paying your bills, your ratio, you're getting near that line where things could get scary and you know how lenders are.

Because if you get near that ratio, what they'll do is they'll jack up the interest rate on you. Because supposedly you're more of a risk. Never was late in a payment ever, always paid.

So the CFO says, well, I think though we're going to be okay. And then someone says, well, it's December like 10th. And you know, at Christmas time, the offerings usually aren't that good because you know, everybody's paying off American Express and buying presents and all.

And they said, the CFO said, but you know what? The year's over now, but I think no one's going to say anything. I think we're good. So I just felt prompted because of all the things God has done for me.

And I said, well, wait a minute, everybody. The year's not over yet. They said, I know, but it's December 10th, 12th, whatever it was.

I said, no, but it's not over yet. No one knows what God can do. Everyone went, yeah, that's true.

Praise God and all that. Two days later, I get a call. My assistant says, this man wants to meet with you.

Businessman has hedge fund in the city. And he sat at your table when you were speaking for Rabi Zacharias at his fundraising event. And he just wants to see you.

Going to come with his assistant. So he wants you to pray for him. He's got things facing him.

So I said, whatever. I don't think anyone who was in the office, but me, a couple of people. It was near Christmas.

Everyone's schmoozing. And I go to the diner down here first before I go to the office. It's early yet.

He's going to meet me at 10 or nine or whatever. And I'm in there having my little fruit cup and decaf. And suddenly he walks in the diner and he sits down next to me.

And he goes, hi, pastor. And I went, hi, we're going to meet upstairs. He says, yeah, I know.

I just came early. He said, I've been just sizing up this. So how'd you get in this building? When'd you get in this building? What money did you have to get in this building? I said, we had none, but God supply.

It's a long story, brother, but no, this is amazing. No, let me walk through. And he looked at whatever the auditorium and everything.

So he comes up to my office and we're sitting talking and he goes, this is amazing. Boy, God has really helped your congregation. I said, yes, God has been faithful.

So he goes, okay, look, I got a lot of appointments today. I don't mean to be impolite pastor, but would you say a quick prayer over me? I guess maybe he thought he's running late. You know, he didn't want a seven, eight minute prayer.

He just wanted something direct to the point. And I was like, yeah, I do short prayers. I do long prayers.

I'll do any kind of prayer. So I just, I guess some of the longest prayers in the Bible are two to three sentences. Most powerful prayers.

You have to pray a long time, pray short time, wait on God, that's another thing. So anyway, I pray and he goes, okay, thank you so much. I'm going to go.

Turns to his assistant, so okay. Okay, so listen, I'm going to give the church a million dollars. This week, I want 500,000 delivered to this church, okay? And next year at the same time, I want the other half a million.

So pastor, I got to go, okay? Thank you for praying and I'm leaving. And I'm going, no, give me hug brother, give me hug. What a track record God had.

Did I ask him for anything? No. Did he know anything about ratios and how we ended the year? God is awesome. Anybody here got something facing you and the devil's telling you, you're not going to make it.

You're not going to get through. Just stand up right where you are. If you got, you're facing something.

Everyone close your eyes. Anybody here just pastor, I needed to hear that. I am not going to disbelieve.

I'm going to believe. Just stand up right where you are. Run up here to the front.

Come on, trot up here. Come on, get up. God's going to help you.

He's everything. He said he would be. And then some.

He does beyond what we could ask or think. Don't let anybody be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and an evil heart of unbelief develop among you. Don't be like your forefathers who tested me in the wilderness.

They saw that I was everything I promised to be and they still wouldn't believe. They still worried. They still fretted.

They still complained. They still pitied themselves. No, believe, believe.

For the just shall live by faith. For without faith, it's impossible to please God. Lord, I pray for my friends that no one will be afraid.

We're going to walk out of this building, taking our position as more than conquerors. We have tested and tried you over the years. Oh, my goodness.

You are awesome. You surprised us with your power, with your love. When we didn't think you were watching, you came through in areas we didn't even know you knew about.

We praise you. Don't let anyone have a heart of unbelief here. Let us make you happy by trusting you.

Trusting you. You love when we sing. You love when we pray.

But what you love most of all is when we trust in you. Father, we trust in you. Thank you for all the things that have happened here, praying for the Caribbean, the singers, communion, prayer requests, praising you, reminded that you are faithful.

Get everyone home safely now, Lord. Everyone home safely. Help us to love each other now as we end this service in Jesus' name.

And everyone said, turn around and hug somebody. Give someone a handshake. God bless you.

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