

Test of Life

by William MacDonald

The sermon 'Test of Life' by William MacDonald explores the marks of true faith in the Lord Jesus, including the confession of Jesus as Christ, the practice of righteousness, and the absence of worldliness.

Duration: 46:19

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 John 2:12-15, 1 John 2:19

Topics: "Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of raising children for God rather than for worldly ambitions. He highlights the spiritual well-being of children as a priority, rather than their worldly success. The preacher also discusses the emptiness of worldly pursuits and the need for a relationship with Christ to find true fulfillment. He warns against the influence of television and other worldly distractions that can negatively impact one's spiritual life. Additionally, the preacher shares a personal anecdote about the value of simplicity and humility in following Jesus.

Transcript

I think we should just pause to pray in some of the things we've been hearing about this morning. Shall we pray? Father, we feel that we've heard your voice speaking to us, and we would like to come into your presence in the prevailing name of the Lord Jesus. To make these things a matter of prayer, we've heard of the tremendous dearth of evangelists in our midst today, and we know that it's true.

Father, we do pray that you will raise up men who will be flaming heralds of the cross in our midst, men who are graced with the gift of evangelism, men who have a sense of souls in need, and the true ability to convey the gospel and to see men and women come weeping to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. We do pray for this very specifically today. We've been reminded, too, Lord, of our prayerlessness.

Perhaps most of us, if we are honest, would confess that this is one of the weakest areas of our lives, and we would pray with the disciples, Lord, teach us to pray. Help us to move men through you by prayer. May we be good students in the school of prayer.

Lord, we pray today that you will deliver us from the curse of a dry-eyed Christianity. We pray that we might be truly broken at the foot of the cross. We pray, Lord, that you will break us, no matter what the cost might be, that we might be irresistible in your presence, because you cannot resist a broken and a contrite heart.

And then, Lord, we do pray for our children, for the little ones. We would pray with one of old that not one hoof might be left behind. Lord, deliver Christian parents today from the grief of being in heaven without their loved ones.

We pray, Lord, for Christian homes where the word of God is read together and where prayer is made. Many of us can thank you for this tremendous heritage. Perhaps families of poverty in other ways, and yet rich in the things of God.

We would pray for this great boom today for our boys and girls. We think of them as they gather this afternoon with Brother Steve. And, Lord, we just pray that the Spirit of God might speak loudly through your word.

We ask it as we give our thanks in the Savior's worthy and precious name. Amen. Would you look with me, please, at 1 John, chapter 2, verses 12 through 17.

1 John, chapter 2, beginning in verse 12. I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.

I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning.

I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. Love not the world. These are the things that are in the world.

If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, that he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

We mentioned last night that in this first epistle of John, he is giving what we might call the tests of life. He is describing the marks of those who are true believers in the Lord Jesus. John is not satisfied with mere profession.

You know that there is a great wave of profession sweeping over the world today. The words born again are good words. They're accepted.

They're very valuable from a business standpoint and from a political standpoint. But John is not taken in by that. John feels that where there is true faith in the Lord Jesus, there will be the manifestation of it in the life of those who confess his name.

And in this epistle, he goes over those marks of a true believer, reminding us that the false teachers who had come into the churches did not pass these tests. Perhaps we could just go over some of the tests at the outset today. One of the primary tests of a true believer is the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

This is the test of sound doctrine, and this is the test, of course, which the cults who come to your door flunk every time. The great question to ask them is, is Jesus Christ God? Do you honor the Son as you honor the Father? And if they're honest with you, they'll have to stand on one foot and then the other and say no. That's true.

So John, first of all, wants to hear that heartfelt confession of one who professes the name of Christ, that Jesus Christ is God. Jesus is Lord. Praise his name.

A second test of life is that one who is truly born of God does not practice sin. And we'll be thinking about that this afternoon, Lord willing, and so I won't say any more about it today. A third test is that one who is begotten of God does practice righteousness.

That's the other side of the coin. It would be one thing, it would be possible not to practice sin, and yet not to go out in active practice of righteousness, and John insists on that, too. The true believer loves God, and he loves the people of God.

It's an instinct that's born in him when he trusts the sinner's Savior. We have a friend out west just now, and he professes the name of Christ, but when God's people are meeting in the assembly, he's out rock hunting, and there are questions, question marks going on all over our minds. I wonder what John would say.

He likes rocks better than he likes God's people, I think. Is that what you would call rocks in the head? I'm not sure. Another test that we saw last night is the test of obedience.

John says the child of God characteristically obeys the commandments of the Lord, and we went over that in some detail. John says, furthermore, that the true believer does not forsake the Christian fellowship. He says of these Gnostics, these false teachers who had come in, they went out from us because they were not of us.

If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. It doesn't mean that they left one Christian assembly and went to another. It means they abandoned the Christian fellowship completely, reminding us, as we said before, that true faith always has the quality of permanence.

Mind you, faith may have lapses. Abraham's faith did. He went down to Egypt, but true faith does go on to the end for all of that.

And that's what the writer to the Hebrews was referring to. He said, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together. And we generally use that verse to teach faithfulness and attendance at the meetings of the assembly, and I think that's a valid application of it.

But in its context, forsaking the assembling of yourselves together was the sin of apostasy. It was the sin of turning your back on the Christian fellowship and all it stood for. The true child of God has the witness of the Spirit, John tells us.

Now, the witness of the Spirit is not some emotional, subjective feeling that comes into the soul when one is born again, but it's the sure witness of the Spirit of God through the Word of God. That was helpful to me when I first realized that the primary way in which the Spirit of God witnesses to my spirit is through the Word of God. I read the Word of God, the Spirit of God witnesses to me that this is indeed the truth.

Now, I don't deny that there are other aspects of the witness of the Spirit. I listened to Brother Snadden preaching, and the Spirit of God witnesses to me this is the truth of God's Word. And I don't deny that there are subjective experiences of the Holy Spirit, but primarily the Spirit of God witnesses through the Word of God.

And then another test, and the one we'd like to think about this morning, another test of the true believer is that he does not love the world. Did you notice that? Verse 15, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Now, first of all, we want to think about the word world. Sometimes it's hard for us to just get an idea in our minds as to what the world is about which John is speaking. First of all, it's not the planet we live on, the late, great planet Earth, is it? That's not what John is talking about.

It's not the world of beautiful nature with the blue bonnets springing up by the side of the freeway. It's not that. I hope we're never too spiritual to enjoy the wonders of God in creation.

Jesus said, take a little time and consider the lilies of the field. Well, actually, they were the wildflowers of the field. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

No, it's not that world. It's not the world of the stellar heavens that we can see God's power and wisdom in so clearly. The world that John is speaking about here is a society or a system that man has built up in order to make himself happy without God.

That's what it is. A society or a system, a world system about us that man builds up in order to make himself happy without God. It's a kingdom that's opposed to God.

The ruler of that kingdom is Satan, and all unbelievers are subjects of that kingdom. Young people here who are attending high school, you know what the world is. It's that tremendous pressure system that's all around you trying to make you conform to its mold.

You young people who are in college, you know what the world is like. Again, a system that hates you if you don't conform. The world hates non-conformists.

That's why it hated the Lord Jesus, and that's why it crucified the Lord Jesus, because he refused to conform. And if you still don't know what the world is, turn on your television set, because I don't know any better way of seeing what the world is than modern television. It brings the world into your living room.

It really does. The world has its own art forms. It has its own thought patterns.

It has its own lifestyle. It has its own music. It has its own religion.

That's a shocker, isn't it? Hard to think of the world being religious, but the world does have its own religious system. It has its own amusements. Actually, it was the religious world that crucified the Lord, wasn't it? It wasn't just Rome taken by itself, but it was Rome goaded on by the religious leaders of that day.

What a terrible thing. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ died to deliver us from this system. Imagine that.

He died to deliver us from this present evil age. And the Apostle Paul reminds us that the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world, those of us who are believers. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

What a wonderful thing. The Lord was crucified on the cross. I was crucified on the cross.

The world was crucified there, too. And now that I'm a believer, the world says to me, Do you do this? And I say, No, I don't do that. And they say, Do you do this? I don't do that.

And they say, Man, you're dead. Well, that's right. I was crucified to the world.

They say, So long. And I say, Thank you very much. It's disloyalty for believers to love the world.

It says that very clearly here. It says, If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. You can't love the world and love God at the same time.

It's a moral impossibility. The hands of the world are stained with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And for a Christian, to be pals with the world is to be a traitor to the Savior, isn't it? These things are just simple facts.

Believers are not of the world. We're in the world, but we're not of the world, and we're sent forth to testify to the world that its deeds are evil, and to announce to the world that there is a way of deliverance, there is salvation, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has defined worldliness, and I like it, as the love of passing things.

That's good. The love of passing things. I often think of that verse that's right from this portion, inscribed on the tombstone of Dwight L. Moody, He that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Now, what does John teach us in this first epistle about the world? Well, he teaches us that the world consists of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. And we'll be thinking about those three things.

If you want to know what the world has to offer today, it's all summed up in verse 16. The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. John teaches us that the world doesn't know the believer because it didn't know Christ.

And I understand that means the world can't understand the believer. The believer is an enigma to the world, a puzzle. The world can't understand what makes the believer tick.

It didn't understand the Lord Jesus. He came different from anyone else who had ever traveled the dusty roads of this world. But John says, false teachers are of the world, and therefore the world hears them.

Interesting, isn't it? Think about these Gnostics that had crept into the church, and the people of the world heard them gladly because they were of the world. And finally, John teaches us that the whole world lies in the wicked one. The world lies in the control of Satan, the prince of this world.

What is worldliness? Well, John says the lust of the flesh. And I should just pause to say a few words about the word lust in the New Testament. The word lust in the New Testament is a morally neutral word.

When we use it, it's invariably bad. When we think of lust, we think of something that's always bad. But it's not always bad in the New Testament.

The word means appetite or desire. And three times in the New Testament, it's used in a good sense. Of all the other times, it's used in a bad sense.

For instance, the Lord Jesus said he used the word with desire. I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. That's a good use of the word lust.

He also, in Philippians 1.23, he says, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Now, it wouldn't read too good. It wouldn't sound too good in our ears if we put the word lust in there, but it is the same word, desire.

And then again, in 1 Thessalonians 2.17, Paul spoke of his great desire to see the saints. But otherwise, in all other cases in the New Testament, the word lust is used in an evil sense. And John tells us that the world consists of the lust of the flesh, the desires of the flesh, indulged in apart from the will of God.

Eve faced this in her temptation in the garden. The tree was good for food. It was forbidden by God.

She saw that it was good for food. The fruit wasn't poisonous in itself. The only thing that made it poisonous was that God had forbidden it.

That lust was so strong in Eve. The devil came and said, Come on, have some. Oh, I can't take any of this.

Yeah, come on, have some. Eve had to decide whether God was lying or Satan was lying, and she decided that God was lying, and she took some. She plunged the world into sin, so that every hearse you've ever seen, and every hospital, and every cemetery, all of the misery and degradation and depravity that had ever entered the world came from that act.

On the contrary, the Lord Jesus is there in the temptation, and the devil comes to him and says, Command that these stones be made bread, and appeal to the lust of the flesh. Jesus said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Something more important than satisfying that physical desire, satisfying spiritual need is far more important.

Now, when we think of lust today, we commonly think of sexual appetites, and it certainly includes that as well. And this is one of the things that TV and the movies and everything else seeks to get across to the world, that the thing to do is live as if the satisfaction of sexual appetite were the most important thing in the world. Right, that's what they say.

That's what it's all about. But it can also mean to cater to the body as far as the satisfaction of food is concerned, living as if food were the main thing. And if you travel much in planes and listen to what people around you are talking, they tell what they had at that restaurant in Geneva, and what they hope to have when they get to Athens.

It's one long dietary discourse. I often sit and listen to people in the world talking, and think how empty it is. Foods for the body, and the body for foods, and God shall destroy both it and them.

It can mean catering to the body in the matter of comforts, being so comfortable with all our cushions and props and supports and crutches and all the rest that if God called us, we couldn't possibly move. When we think of the will of God, all we can think of is tarantulas and serpents and so forth. And to give up comforts, the comforts of the United States, to go to the regions beyond, no thanks.

It can mean to cater to the body in the matter of sports and recreation, which in their own place are excellent. But when they become the God of our life, very, very bad. It has to do with the lust of the eyes, too.

Really, our eyes are sinning members, aren't they? The lust of the eyes. Eve looked at the fruit, and it was pleasant to the eyes. But when the Lord was taken up and shown the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, he didn't fall for that temptation.

Mind you, I think Satan could offer them to him because he is the God of this age. But obedience to God, the will of God, came before all else. It's interesting to me that Satan could show the Lord Jesus all he had to offer in a moment of time.

The world can show you all it has to offer in a moment of time. God can't show you all he has to offer in a moment of time. It says in Ephesians 2-7 that in the ages to come, he might show what is the exceeding riches of his kindness, his love toward us through Christ Jesus.

It's going to take God all eternity to show you and to show me all that was done there at Calvary. The inheritance that was purchased for us there, all the truths of the word of God, which we now see through a glass darkly. Heaven is going to be a school, an eternal school.

We're going to be the pupils. The Bible is going to be the textbook, and God is going to be the teacher. That pleases me to think of heaven.

Heaven is going to be a place of progress. When I was a little boy, I thought that the minute I got to heaven, I'd know everything. Well, that won't ever be true.

I'll never know. Only God knows everything, and we'll never beat God, and we'll be learning throughout all eternity. Doesn't that please you? I'll tell you, it's better than sitting under a palm tree strumming a ukulele, which is the common concept of heaven.

I wouldn't be interested in that heaven, frankly. I want a heaven of progress, a heaven of service. His servants shall serve him, a heaven of growth.

I like to think that in heaven, God is going to reveal all the wonders of his natural creation, and they are many. He's going to reveal all the wonders of his spiritual creation as well. The half has not been fancy.

What is the lust of the eyes to us today? Well, to bring it down to Dallas in 1982, for instance, it could be the shopping obsession. I get up in the morning, get the car revved up, and embark on one enormous shopping spree. In the back of my mind is that illusion that if I could just get all the things that were advertised in the paper yesterday, all the latest gadgets and gimmicks and hot-and-cold holding doors and everything you can think of, if I could just get all of that, I'd be happy.

The lust of the eyes. But I think those of us who are Christians here today know it just isn't true. The God, who was it, Pascal said there's a God-shaped vacuum to the human heart, and all the things of the world, if I could get everything in the Sears Roebuck catalog, it still wouldn't satisfy me.

Did you know that? I'd always be pressing on for something more. That's what the book of Ecclesiastes is all about. Solomon tried to satisfy his heart with all the world had to offer, and his conclusion was, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

And Jesus said that to the woman at the well, didn't he? He said, whoever shall drink of this water shall thirst again. I'll tell you, that's true. That's true.

You drink of the water of this world, and you'll thirst again. But he said, whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up unto life eternal. Praise God.

That's what the Song of Solomon is all about. In the book of Ecclesiastes, the world isn't big enough to fill the human heart. But in the Song of Solomon, the human heart isn't big enough to contain the love of the Lord.

You find the Shulamite maiden saying, I am sick of love, Phoenix. I can't take any more. If there was any more, I'd burst.

That's good. The lust of the eyes, the shopping obsession, the travel obsession. You know, if I could just go to all the places that that local travel agent is advertising, and see all the sights that the world has to offer, I think I'd be satisfied.

You really wouldn't. It gets old hat very quickly. It really does.

And you come home jaded. A friend of mine tells about going overseas and traveling in many different countries overseas, and then they came back to the United States, and the plane is coming down at Kennedy Airport, and they see a McDonald's hamburger, and the whole plane breaks out clapping. So glad to be home.

That was a free ad for McDonald's hamburger. The lust of the eyes. May I come back to television once again.

Television said in itself, of course, is morally neutral, too. But television in the United States today is an enormous wasteland, but a cesspool of sin, too, really. And the terrible thing is that I can watch it, and watch it, and watch it, and pretty soon I become accustomed to it, and I don't realize how my spiritual temperature has slipped.

I just cannot spend my life watching Hollywood harlots parading across the screen without being affected by it. I don't realize it, but I think my friends can smell the onions of Egypt on my breath. I can't listen to those comedians with their suggestive jokes.

You can't see the filth in it. They're not funny. Can I sit there by the hour and listen to that stuff, and then go and lift up my heart and worship to the Lord on Lord's Day morning at the break in a prayer? Things don't mix today.

The lust of the eyes. And then the world consists of the pride of life, the tree to be desired to make one wise. The pride of life.

And, of course, that's what Satan was appealing to in the life of the Lord Jesus. Take him up to the pinnacle of the devil and say, Look, now, just do a spectacular stunt. You fall down.

It says in Psalm 91, He'll give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways, doesn't it? But I tell you, if you perform a stunt like that, you'll become a popular hero. That was the come-on that Satan offered the Lord Jesus. The pride of life.

And he's offering it to the people of God down through the years. Styles to attract attention. God never put us down here to be attention-getters for ourselves, did he? For him, yes, but not for ourselves.

And, you know, religious flesh is no better than non-religious flesh. And I tell you, you can see the pride of life at Bible conferences just as well as you can down in Neiman Marcus. The pride of life, the desire to have things that no one else has.

I often have to chuckle at ourselves, at ourselves, human beings. What a perverse twist in human nature that is. I want to have something you don't have.

That puts me two rungs above you on the social ladder or slightly higher on the totem pole. What nonsense. I often think of the Lord Jesus in that connection.

He came into the world and, apart from his character, he never had anything that would make anyone jealous of him. Isn't that beautiful? Nobody ever had to be jealous of the Lord Jesus. You don't have to be jealous of anyone who can say, "...foxes of holes and birds of the air have nested the Son of Man, but not where to lay his head." You don't have to be jealous of a person like that.

He made himself of no reputation. He emptied himself. Really wonderful.

He didn't desire to have things that no one else had. We talked last night about the flaunting of degrees and titles and, perhaps, salaries or great names, where the donor has his name inscribed on a bronze plaque so that everyone will know that he was the donor. Worldliness is what it is.

To go back just a minute to what I said before about the Lord Jesus, I can never forget those wonderful words of Denny, the commentator. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, he said, "...the only perfect life ever lived on this earth, he owned nothing and left nothing but the clothes that he wore." That touches my heart. I'd like to follow him in that.

He owned nothing and left nothing but the clothes that he wore. The pride of life. Making an outward show.

Making an outward show. And you can do this in a religious sense, too. Years ago, when I was at Emmaus, I had a tremendous library.

I had all 34 volumes of Derby, collected writings of Derby. I never read them, but they certainly made me look like a scholar. And I'll never forget one day a young disciple named George Verver came into my office.

And I'm sitting there in all my glory in this tremendous library behind me. George looked at the books and he said, "Liz McDonald, have you read all those books?" And I thought I could feel a noose around my neck. And I said, "No, George, I haven't read all those books." So he thought he'd try again.

He said, "Do you know what are in all of those books?" And I said, "No, George, I..." It was really getting quite warm in the room. I said, "I really don't know what's in all of those books." And then he started to say something to me, and he kind of plucked the words back into his mouth. And I said, "Listen, George, if you have something to say to me from the Lord, I want you to say it." And he said to me, "Mr.

McDonald, when I look at those books, all I can think of is souls." What did he mean by that? Well, I didn't need an interpreter. I knew what he meant. He meant, "Look, if you've never read any of those books, some of those books, and you're never going to read them, why don't you convert them into cash? Why don't you convert the cash into gospel literature, so that souls be saved in worshiping the Lamb of God through all eternity?" That's what he was saying.

And I got the point. Very, very searching. "The pride of life, the practice of name-dropping, or the love of popularity and the praise of men." What an empty thing it is.

I often think of that. Before I was saved, one of the things that kept me from being saved was the scalding shame of going back to my schoolmates and telling them I was saved. What they thought seemed so important to me that it kept me from Jesus.

I couldn't name one of those people today. I don't even remember who they were, but God is still there. How foolish it is to esteem the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Do you know that we can have the pride of life in our weddings and in our funerals? Ever think of a worldly Christian funeral? Well, a lot of our funerals are worldly. Dressing the dead body in a Dior original with a casket that could evangelize Portugal. It's true.

It's absolutely true. It's worldliness. Our weddings are worldly.

I long to see some innovative Christian young people who can break the pattern and design truly Christian weddings. Pride of heritage. My ancestors, you understand, came over on the Mayflower.

And I close with this because it fits in with what Brother Stanley said. Worldly ambitions for our children and our loved ones. Worldly ambitions for our children and our loved ones.

I'm sorry to say that many Christian people today are raising their children for the world and for hell instead of for God. I say to that mother, How's your son? Oh, she just gushes he's getting along just fine. Vice President in charge of paper clips for the Amalgamated Futility Company.

And I say, How's he doing spiritually? And her face drops. Well, I can't say too much about that. But he's doing fine.

You got it? He's doing fine. He's not doing fine. He's a disaster.

Because Christ isn't in his life. Years ago, we used to have hymns in our hymn book. We don't have any more.

You young people would never miss it, because you never knew it was there. But I'd like to read you three verses from three hymns that haunt me. I love them.

We are but strangers here. We do not crave a home on earth which gave thee but a grave. Thy cross has severed ties which bound us here.

Thyself our treasure in a brighter sphere. Get it? Here's another one. But should we to gain the world's applause or to escape its harmless frown refuse to countenance thy cause and make thy people's lot our own, what shame would fill us in that day when thou thy glory wilt display? And here's the third.

Master, we would no longer be at home in that which hated thee, but patient in thy footsteps go, thy sorrow as thy joy to know. We would in all confirm the power with meekness meet the darkest hour. By shame, contempt, however tried, for thou was scorned and crucified.

Shall we pray?

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