

DIFFERENT FAITH IN TRIALS

One of the social phenomenons running across our country is the show American Ninja Warrior. How many have ever seen this show. It is so popular that showing up across the States are Ninja Warrior gyms. Maybe there are some who have been to those as well. And the point of the show and these gyms is to test you and see how much of a Ninja Warrior you are. So you have the infamous warped wall, the salmon ladder, or the spider jump. The ultimate test as you know though is Mt. Midoriyama. Only a select few have every conquered that test. For me I'm not sure how much it tests your Ninja abilities as much as you shoulder and grip strength. It's like all upper body. I bring up this show because I believe life is full of tests. Some you sign up for and some you do not.

Some are memorable like the ACTs. Anyone remember taking that test. I was in Oveido FL, in a high school I didn't attend surrounded by kids I'd never met. I had to get a 18 or higher to go to my college and if I scored above 24 on the math portion I would never have to take math again. I was so nervous to get the results back, but the tests did reveal I could go to MLC and never take math again. If it's not the ACTs perhaps you remember your drivers test. Which in an age of cars that parallel park for you will that work on the test. Just press the button? Our kids are taking Aimsweb tests and other things. And here's what I believe about tests. *Tests reveal where we are at.* How much of a Ninja you are, how good at driving, how smart.

Because of this tests can be scary - I was talking with a buddy of mine who is nervous about a home health check up for insurance purposes. And he's nervous about what that test might reveal. High cholesterol or blood pressure. I don't know if you've ever been there.

Well, as we've come to church today, and welcome by the way if you are new. We are so glad you are here. Kick the tires of the church, ask questions, get involved but overall welcome. As we've gathered here, we consider the things of God and this is what I think you should know about God. *God is a test-giver.* When it comes to those who follow him he allows them to go through certain trials and tests. Which maybe a misnomer if you're knew to God. See you might think that if I follow God then I will have more comfortability, ease, and overall goodness. But no he warned us about tests when Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." And I allow tests in order to reveal where our faith is. How strong it is, and who it is in.

In fact some of you came in today in the middle of a test. For some of you, it is harder than the ACTs. You came in today and you're wondering how it is going to turn out with your child who isn't making great decisions, or doesn't seem to be on the right course. You've been praying about them, but you just don't. You came in wondering about finances. Is this the job to stay at or what the next one is going to be. You may be dealing with anxiety or depression and like am I ever going to get better and what is the solution?

You know it's hard not to notice all the tests being allowed right now for people all over. This has been a year of extreme tragedy and trial. You look at the wildfires in California and the 3500 buildings destroyed and 31 lives taken. Or the Vegas shooting with over 50 dead and 500 injured. All coming after the Hurricanes that struck and people are recovering from. And these

things are evidence of a sinful world, a world fallen and broken and without repair. This world that does reflect the perfect character of God, but these things I talk about do represent the consequences of sin. Yet they were allowed, and so it's a testing.

So why the tests? Let me give you a couple reasons people may think the tests exist, but are not true. One is that God is tempting us, so that we can fall into sin. Like back to the tree in the Garden of Eden. Why did he make it? He must want mankind to fall. That's a lie. Look here at James it says, "13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone." (James 1:13) So if you're ever like well God just wants me to sin otherwise I wouldn't be in this situation. No not his purpose. Doesn't want us to fall. Another thing that is not his purpose is to get us to doubt. He doesn't want us to doubt his goodness or his presence. I consider the interchange Jesus had with a gal named Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus. "25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Why ask do you believe this. To hear her say, no way. Never. No. He didn't want her to doubt though she was in the middle of a test.

So what are God's purposes for giving us tests? That's what I want to talk about with you this morning. I'm so excited to be starting this series Different. We're going to be diving into the book of 1 Peter. Which can anyone guess who the author of 1 Peter is? Good someone had their coffee. But let me explain the test he and the other Christians were in. Peter was most likely in Rome during the reign of Ceasar Nero. Nero goes down as one of the worst rulers ever, who especially loved to pick on Christ followers. The historian Tacitus said that he would cover Christians in the skins of animals and have them torn apart by dogs. It's said he would cover them with tar and tie them to trees, and setting them on fire they would serve as candles for his dinner parties. This is a time of extreme trial and testing. BTW I know things might not be ideal politically, but perhaps this is some perspective. And yet into this dynamic Peter writes with encouragement and boldness. Consider it joy in trial. Inexpressible joy - under Nero. Maybe there is a different way we need to look at trails and testing. That's what we want to discuss, can you turn to the person next to you and say, "Hello Stranger."

I don't know if anyone here has ever read the book "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair. It documents the struggle of 1st generation immigrants coming to America. It was a made up story of a Lithuanian man named Jurgis who went to work in the meat packing industry in Chicago in the early 1900s. It described working conditions where life and limb were commonly risked for the sake of meatpacking industry. I found this picture of Chicago Stockyards around that time. In fact Jurgis' father died because as a direct result of the unsafe working conditions, a child of Jurgis died of food poisoning, and they lost their home working hard but unable to afford it. There were other heart wrenching details in the story, that for me a Junior in College it led me to remember and greatly dislike the book. But the reason I bring it up is I believe it is hard if you are the new person in a foreign land. If you ever moved away from family, if you knew 1st generation immigrants, if you were ever a stranger you know the difficulty. Some of you that was college. Why didn't the dishes get washed, the laundry machine is where, buy my own toilet paper?

I bring this up because Peter is addressing the other Christ-followers and us in a very particular way. He says in v.1 To the exiles, or to the strangers on earth. To those who are not

home. He recognizes that wherever the Christians are scattered about they are strangers in a distant land.

Have you ever felt that way? Felt like an exile, and outcast, a stranger in a weird, weird land. And is it possible we have lives that may mimic at times that of Jurgis, because we don't have the comforts of our true home. We're trying to make it a place that was never meant for us, and will be hostile until we arrive at home. We are first generation immigrants wondering where the comforts of the motherland went. I love the way C. S. Lewis put it, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same."

Yes, if you are a Christ follower you find your truth and your hope in this. We are not home. I love the Hymn that says, "I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home. Earth is a desert drear, heaven is my home. Danger and sorrow stand. Round me on every hand. Heaven is my father land. Heaven is my home." I love not what C.S. Lewis but what Paul said when he wrote, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling." (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). We are tenting we are camping. We are not home, and so sometimes we have experiences that remind us of that brutal fact and our lives at times mirror the struggle of migrant worker Jurgis.

And what is God doing when he then allows trial and test and things that don't go our way. This is the first take away. *Trials remind us that we are not home.* And I don't joy in our suffering or anyone else's. But if God uses the threat of a hurricane, or uses a wildfire, or a tornado or flooding to remind us that the house we live in is but a tent - that is love. That's a Father reminding us we cannot mix up this place for that place. He loves you too much to allow you to live so conveniently and comfortably that you don't long for your motherland. So there are hiccups in the remodel, or if you watch HGTV there are things missing in that dream home no matter the budget, there are imperfections that make us long for a perfect world. That's what Peter felt in prison in Rome. Peter who was married and away from his homeland in Israel and his wife away maybe with him on the mission trip, and yet they are not longing for that promised land as much as the heavenly one. So we rejoice in trials.

And some tests feel like fire on our faith. So go with me here. I remembering being in Mexico and they took us to a shop selling silver really a tourist trap if you've ever been there, and our lead tour guide took out his silver chain and put fire against it to prove whether or not it was real. His was in fact real, not sure about everything else they sold in Mexico. We didn't buy any in order to find out.

Peter is using that same imagery. He says God will use the fire to test not silver but your faith. Now as we talk about faith let explain something. Saving faith what is needed when Jesus returns, when we die, or at the end is a faith that proclaims Jesus is my Lord and Savior, and the reason for my salvation. That is saving faith. If you believe Jesus is Lord and Savior you

have saving faith. But there is also strong and weak saving faith. And so God brings tests, brings our faith to the fire, so we can have what kind. Strong faith.

With that let us consider some forms of weak faith. One form is a *shallow faith*. A faith that only says Jesus loves me so for the Bible tells me so and that's all I want to know. It is good that you know Jesus as Savior, that is the starting and finishing point of faith. But he wants you to grow in the fullness of knowledge. To dig into the word, dig into the who He is, receive the Sacraments, join a church. Because the world we live in throws contrary messages at us all the time. And fires come. And a shallow faith may not survive a contrary message of political correctness, or things that are Biblical but not socially acceptable. A shallow faith may not survive a group of friends who want nothing to do with the Bible or God's ways. The fire may burn it.

Another form of weak faith is *conditional faith*. A faith that believes as long as God does what you think he should do. And somehow his activity in your life or in the world fits your worldview. But if it doesn't go according to your plan, your faith is shaken. So he'll bring the fire and it may not survive if you haven't learned what Jesus proclaimed - your will be done.

Finally a form of weak faith is an *inherited or borrowed faith*. It is the grace of God that many of us have had Christians examples in our parents or grandparents. But they will not stand in front of Jesus at the end, you will. At one point or another you will have to take ownership of this faith, and it should be about culturally appeasing their expectations. You will have to find a way to pursue God with passion and authenticity. To raise up your household and the next generation. If you're relying on someone else to carry your faith it may not make it through the fire.

But then there is a strong faith. A faith that will not easily be burnt up. A faith that will be proved genuine and pure when the fire comes. Let us covet, let us reach, let us strive for that. Yet at this point who of us can claim a perfectly strong faith? Who is bold enough to say mine can withstand any fire, any test, any trial. No today we repent for the times we haven't had a strong faith, haven't trusted, haven't pursued God. Whether because of a shallow or an inherited faith. Today we repent of the times when tested we failed. Our faith has not yet been perfect. And if salvation were based on the strength of our faith we'd be lost.

But salvation isn't based on our strength today, it's built on Jesus. Jesus who was tested in many ways, and by the devil himself. Yet through the Word of God was able to stand up and overcome. Jesus who went the testing and the fire of the cross. Jesus who bore that cross out of love for us. And Because Jesus was stronger than your strength, more pure than we could ever be, we are saved. And what signaled this isn't as much the figurative fire that he went through, but the literal grave he rose up from. And it's the resurrection of Jesus that proves his strength. And gives us and all who believe what Peter called a living hope. A hope that our home in heaven is secure, because of Jesus' strength. A hope that we are loved and forgiven because of the cross. A hope that even now God is working gracious for us. Praise God that we are not saved based on our strength, but based on Jesus' strength. Regardless of if you are new or if it's the first time you've heard this. You need to know you have the right to come through the fire of this world of testing, to that heavenly home because of the strength and work of Jesus.

But why the fire. *Trials are sent to refine our faith*. I remember recently interacting with someone with unusual kindness. I was getting my haircut at Great Clips and the hair cutter

showed unusual kindness that seemed genuine. So much so that I wondered how did she get like this? I then started talking and found out that when she was younger her father passed away. She told me about going over to the pastor's home after it and a bit of church. And I couldn't help but think that born out of this tragedy is the unusual kindness she now shares to all.

So much so that I have a theory. You show me someone's strength, and I'll show you many times the trial and the testing that got them there. You show me someone with character and boldness, you can probably trace the fire that God sent and the strength he produced on the other side. Why do I know this, it's what's happened in my own life and in the life of those I love. It's what the fire does. I consider what James says about testing, "2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." (1:2-3) There's a reason I'm going to be kind, outgoing, sharing of my faith, compassionate, forgiving. These enduring characters are what happen going through the fire. For me in ministry. Going through tests and trials - why? So I can share with you I'm not stopping, by God's grace I will keep proclaiming he is the answer and hope of the world. God is teaching me to persevere.

But a final reason for the trials. The final reason I think is best shared via video. In this video the pastor is setting up a Father representing God, and an infant representing us. He is taking his infant in his backpack for a walk in the forest, but unexpectedly a storm breaks out. The child is scared and crying, but pay attention to what the Father does, pay attention to what the Father says. You have a Father too who can hold you close, and who wants you to know how good He is and how good he will be. But a final purpose for the trials. *Trials are allowed in order to draw you close.* He wants us all to see how faithful he can be in spite of the trial, how good and tender he is when life is at its worst. He is a good a perfect Father who loves to hold his children. But sometimes his children don't allow him to hold them, until the trial comes.

You know it was interesting talking to some of my family before and after Hurricane Irma. That's a trial. And before was the fire of anticipation and the unknown for a Hurricane that looked like a monster. But after it was all said and done and though there was damage, I could hear in the voice of my family one of intimacy and drawing closer to God.

As a pastor I would love to tell you people come searching out God when times are good, but the opposite is true they come in times of crisis and trial and they learn what a good Father he is. So it is true with all of us. We have a Father that wants to hold us and for us to know how good he is. He may allow some trials to come so we cling to him, so we long for his voice of assurance and love.

I was translating v.6 look at a more literal translation, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials." If necessary. I was wrestling with that. And I've come to believe we can take the if out. Trials if necessary, no trials are necessary. To remind us we are not home. To strengthen our resolve and endurance, and to get us to crave his embrace, his tenderness, and his love. Amen.