**Adult Sunday School**

May 22, 2011

**The time of providential testing**

Psalm 75:2—*When I shall receive the congregation I will judge uprightly.*

The Supreme God is speaking

Jehovah is the speaker.

1. **A Time of Providence**

*“****When****”*

*“When I shall receive”*

When I see my time (says God)

When the proper time is come; the congregation, my people of Israel, shall be brought out of captivity, and received back into favour,

Ps 102:13 Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.

* His blows of chastening are correct
* His Deliverances are sure

2Co 6:2*—(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*

Col 1:6—*Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:*

True Spiritual Character is revealed through Testing

1. Trials Describe Character
   1. Character is determined by responses to tests
   2. All biblical characters are known for humility or humiliation by testing.
      1. Adam and Eve are known for failing the test.
         1. Tempted by the serpent/Garden
         2. Tested by God
      2. Abraham passed the test of **loyalty** and **faith** when he offered up Isaac;
      3. Joseph for resisting sexual sin;
      4. David for giving in to sexual sin;
      5. Daniel for praying when the lions' den was a threat;
      6. Ruth for remaining loyal to her mother-in-law;
      7. Esther for being loyal to her nation.

All **tests** people go through; either come out "*failed*" or "*passed*." When they come out "failed," further testing in that area is necessary.

Jesus Christ's sinless character and personality shows He handled the continuous testing caused by people and circumstances during His public years.

Tests He passed became excellent examples for us today, to know how to follow.

Heb 4:15—*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

The *tests* in the Bible are so central to the stories themselves that it becomes virtually impossible to classify the things that test a person. ***All of life tests us*** -every minute of every day. The world of nature and weather test us. People test us. Personal relationships test us, bringing our character traits out in the process.

The Bible shows character in extraordinary or unusual situations being tested.

If there is anything distinctive to the tests of the Bible, it is the testing that transpires between God and people.

Providence - all events in a person's life are arranged by God - we find God testing His people.

2Cor. 13:5—*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? 6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. 7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.*

"Do" is action.

Action equals character and character equals action. We may seem disqualified, failures in the minds of other people, “be as reprobates” but we rejoice in the God of our Salvation and believe that, what He has started He will finish.

"Examine yourselves" Paul is talking to the Corinthians. By testing themselves the Corinthians would avoid failing when God tests them.

Testing faith produces **patience** and **perseverance -** whether it is God who is testing us, or we ourselves.

James 1:2—*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

*3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

*4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

Rejoicing in the midst of trials is possible and necessary. Trials describe things that put a person to the test. They may be difficulties that come from without (persecution-testings), or they may be inner moral tests (temptations)

Trials are a channel for pure joy. The expression in verse 2 “count it all joy” speaks of full and complete joy. James speaks of the experience of trials of many kinds. There are many different trials testing us. Sometimes they are at the same time, and seem to be heaped upon each other.

James uses the term "fall into" as if one were to fall into the midst of people, objects, or circumstances - trials

Patience is not passively enduring it's the quality that enables us to stand on our feet through the fiercest storms. It is in standing against difficulty and opposition that spiritual stamina is developed.

Lu 10:30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

5281. upomonh hupomone, hoop-om-on-ay' cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy:--enduring, patience, patient continuance (waiting). 5278. upomenw hupomeno, hoop-om-en'-o to stay under (behind), i.e. remain; figuratively, to undergo, i.e. bear (trials), have fortitude, persevere:--abide, endure, (take) patient(-ly), suffer, tarry behind.

It speaks of *tenacity* “to stay under” and *stick-to-itiveness*. “remain; to undergo”

We can become PERFECT, *spiritually mature* and *complete*. It is absolutely correct.

Patience and perseverance in facing trials develops maturity of character. Trials, as a means for joy, are capable of developing *patience* (*perseverance*). Trials put our faith to the test. The question is whether or not faith will persevere in patience. If it is genuine faith, testing serves to develop faith's persistence.

Patience and perseverance have a work to do, and this can be accomplished only bypersistence in trials. If patience is to have "its perfect work" or, perseverance is to "finish its work," **faith must not falter or give up**. Trials enable us to *improve* and *prove* our faith. Paul uses Abraham as an example of someone who grew strong in his faith as he went through the test of waiting twenty-five years for the birth of his son, Isaac.

Romans 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Abraham passed the test. He believed God could make the impossible possible. True faith in God always triumphs in trial, or tests. As long as we believe that everything depends on our efforts, we are bound to be pessimists — because experience has taught the unforgiving lesson that our own efforts can achieve very little. When we realize that it is not our effort, but God's grace and power that matter, then we become optimists — because we are bound to believe that with God nothing is impossible. And from faith in the Word comes joy!

Patience and perseverance

The oppressing rich will be brought to judgment. The oppressed poor must be patient.

Farmer (in verses 7-9), Prophets (in verse 10), and Job (in verse 11).

Jas 5:7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. {Be...: or, Be long patient, or, Suffer with long patience}

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

So there's an area [today] that we are being tested in every day. That is, the grumbling that we have for each other, at times.

Jas 5:10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

patience and perseverance

The *farmer* waits patiently "for the early and latter rains" [that is, the fall and the spring rains]. In Palestine, the early rains came in October and November - soon after the grain was sown through the farmer's perseverance; the latter rains came in April and May - as the grain was maturing. Both rainy seasons were necessary for a successful crop. Knowing this, the farmer was willing to wait patiently until both rains came and provided the needed moisture. And, of course, it is similar with our own **character development.**

The *prophets* who spoke in the name of the Lord. In their position [as His representatives], they experienced affliction and responded to it with long-suffering patience. Although James refers to the prophets as a group, Jeremiah certainly stands out as one who endured mistreatment [with patience and with perseverance]. He was put in the stocks, thrown in prison, and lowered into a miry dungeon - yet he persisted in his ministry without bitterness or recrimination. That testing was severe for him, but he came out ***passing the test.***

*Job*. Those who have endured are considered blessed. In verses 7-10, James' plea is for patience [Greek, *makrothymia*] - which is the self-restraint that doesn't retaliate. But here, in verse 11, James' plea is for perseverance [Greek, *hypomone*] -which is perseverance in difficult circumstances. So though we often hear of "the patience of Job," in the original Greek it is more closely "the perseverance of Job."

It's significant that James doesn't speak of Job's patience, since - despite the popular phrase *"the patience of Job" -* he hardly ever exemplified the quality of patience. [Some examples of that are [Job 12:2](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/13131/eVerseID/13131); [Job 13:3-4](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/13157/eVerseID/13158); and [Job 16:2](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/13241/eVerseID/13241).] However, he was an outstanding example of perseverance in the most trying situations. You are very familiar with the story of his life. [And you'll find examples of that in [Job 1:21-22](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/12891/eVerseID/12892) and also [Job 19:25-27](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/13323/eVerseID/13325).]

Job's experience was also proof that God is full of compassion and mercy, as we see in what God finally brought about for him. Because of Job's perseverance, God gave him twice as much as he had before. In fact, a comparison of the number of Job's livestock at the end of the story with the number at the beginning - verifies that the number is doubled. This is a story of the passing of a test, being **rewarded** and prosperity not only restored - but also magnified. Out of sorrow and tragedy, God chose to bring increase and blessing. Job's perseverance was developed through testing, and his character was strengthened in the meantime.

T*esting* (1) produces character and (2) shows us where we stand with our character in relationship to God. To sum up, in James 5:7-11, James urges us not to fight back but to exercise long-suffering patience toward those who oppress us; he is calling for stouthearted perseverance in the trying circumstances that confront us.

The book of Hebrews is addressed to Christians enduring persecution. It likewise stresses endurance, or holding fast, as the virtues required to pass a test.

Heb 3:6 But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Jesus Christ knows our human condition. It's not something He has heard about [so to speak], but something He knows - since He, too, was a man in the flesh. We may approach Him confidently because He knows and understands our weaknesses.

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Though Jesus did not sin, we must not infer that life was easy for Him. Many times, we give in before the temptation has fully spent itself; but Christ didn't do that. In a sense, He **earned** the sinlessness as He gained victory after victory [in the constant battle with temptation that life dealt out to Him] while He was on earth. The Sinless One knows the force of temptation in a way that - we who sin - do not. Many times we give in before that temptation is fully spent. Only he who does not yield knows its full force — because a person giving into temptation is blind to the consequences.

So if we fail the test, or we don't overcome the temptation, we have not really and truly seen all the lessons to be learned in that temptation that we failed. But Jesus Christ, who was so perfect and passed every test, saw the true impact and consequences of the temptations and the tests that came His way.

The goal of life itself is linked to the test

Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Romans 5 catalogs in ladder-like sequence the specific virtues produced by suffering through tests.

Ro 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Trouble produces **pressure** for us to show perseverance. The word Paul uses for *tribulation* in verse 3 literally means **pressure**. That's exactly what we feel when we are being tested. We feel pressure. Even at a physical level - when we are going through school and we are tested - we are sitting there and laboring over that test and we feel the pressure at that point. It's similar in our spiritual lives.

All kinds of things weigh heavily upon us - desire, sorrow, persecution, unpopularity and loneliness. All that pressure produces ***fortitude***, or produces perseverance. And the word Paul uses here for *perseverance* is the same word he used in James 1:3 and James 5:11It means more than endurance. It means the spirit that can overcome the world. It means the spirit that does not passively endure but that **actively overcomes** the trials and tribulations of life.

"*Perseverance*," Paul goes on, "*produces character*." The word he uses for *character* is used to describe metal that has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used to describe coinage [as we use the word "sterling"] as in sterling silver. When affliction is met with perseverance - out of the battle we emerge stronger, purer, better, and nearer to God. There's much to be joyous about in trials.

"*Character*," Paul continues, "*produces hope*." Two people can meet the same situation. It can drive one of them to despair. And it can spur the other on to triumphant action. The same trial! To the one it can be the end of hope. To the other it can be a challenge to greatness. The difference corresponds to the difference in the character of the people involved.

IF we insist on meeting life with determination [with God's help] - IF we have always faced tests, and by facing them, conquered things — THEN, when the challenge comes, we meet it with eyes aflame [with **hope]**. We meet it with a force [with God's help] that can overcome anything - just as Abraham learned after twenty-five years of waiting for a son. The character that has endured the test always emerges in hope. Our hope never proves to be an illusion because it is founded on the love of God.

*The special reward to those who attain a worthy character is peace of mind or inner happiness.*  
  
*This is not necessarily a life free of problems, nor one of ease and comfort, but it is a life free of inner turmoil and emotional disturbances.*

*Spiritual growth means mental health. These two parallel one another. Only as we overcome, only as we lose self-centeredness and self-indulgence and grow in the grace of a noble character can we gain peace of mind. This truth is supported in the most advanced knowledge of mental health.*

Ultimately, how does God know we love Him and are deeply loyal to Him? Jesus Christ summarized the answer when He said in John 15:8:

Joh 15:8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Just as creation produces both good and bad fruit - so humans can produce fruit that *may* or *may not* be acceptable to God. And God wants us to ***bear good fruit!***

Mt 7:16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Now, a person can **live an illusion** in their life that "fakes out" other people. But, when you look at the fruit that they bear [if it is an illusion] - it is going to bear *bad fruit* — thereby exposing them.

Christ Himself used many examples from agriculture and nature to emphasize the need for Christian growth - for spiritual character building. Here are just a few:

1. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

2. God inspired David to write in Psalm 1:3, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."

3. Paul tells us in [II Corinthians 9:10](http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/28967/eVerseID/28967) "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness." So, we see there THE SOURCE of us bearing fruit.

4. Christ also used the term "good works" - similar to the term "good fruit" - to express the importance of spiritual growth. A *good work* is the manifestation of righteousness. Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Obviously then, God desires that we do good works and bear holy, righteous fruit in order that we might ***glorify Him***. If we are not glorifying Him, we are living the life of a "Christian" as an illusion — and not as a true Christian.

Before it is fully ripe, a peach is tart, green and inedible. In order for it to become ripe and ready for use, it must go through a lengthy process of development. Our goal must be to become perfect. Remember, earlier, that we mentioned that becoming perfect is to become mature [complete or fully developed].

Mt 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Becoming perfect, mature, and complete is ***a lifelong process***. It takes *a lifelong testing of our character*. It may take years from the moment we are regenerated until we are fully mature and ready for the Kingdom. However, in order to attain this high calling, we must become more mature a little each day. And one of the ways that this is done is by the testing, trials, and tribulations that we go through. This means our fruits of righteousness are not just one-time acts. The fruits of God's Spirit are to be expressed again and again in our daily lives - until we actually take on God's likeness. So then, as we continue to allow God's Spirit to motivate our behavior, we will take on, little by little, "the fullness of God," as Ephesians 3:19 tells us.

Eph 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

True righteousness that is imparted is not attained quickly. It involves faith to faith, intense effort and a long period of time - with many, many trials and tests. Out of those trials and tests, we can become an optimist [that gets joy out of them] or we can be a pessimist [that fails them more than not].

The tares in God's Church show only "the appearance" - or give "the illusion" - of a healthy tree; but they have never borne fruit. Others produce blossoms and buds but, through neglect, allow the flow of the Holy Spirit to stop; and the fruit withers and drops off. Still others let the cares of this world, or persecution, drain their strength so that they become barren and fruitless. Jesus Christ warned about these conditions. In one instance, He cursed an unproductive fig tree to show this principle. (fig trees yeild fruit with their leaves)

Mr 11:12 And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:

13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.

14 And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

Mr 11:20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

Now quickly, flip over to John 15; and let's look at another caution by Jesus.

Joh 15:1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

That fig tree wasn't bearing any fruit. So it was useless; and it was cut away, so to speak.

Joh 15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

It would be wise for us to ***examine our lives daily*** to be sure that we're connected to the Vine - tied to Jesus Christ and God the Father in a vital relationship of love - so that we will have the continual strength to produce the rich and abundant crop of spiritual character that God desires. And in the process [in the meantime], He is testing us. He is building that character and developing it in us. The true test of our spiritual character and our right standing with God is that we bear good fruit - not the illusion of fruit - but truly good fruit.

Just as an example, you can look at any of the mainstream Christian churches; and you will see many people serving others. That is, doing what appears to be the right thing. They may be verbally against killing people [committing murder], or they may be out serving more than anyone could possibly have normal time for. But that is "an illusion" of fruit. That's all we are seeing there.

And that is what **a tare** in the church does. A tare in the church shows "the illusion" of fruit, but it is not necessarily true fruit.

True Christians don't live illusions. We have the truth, and with truth comes **reality**. The way we perceive ourselves, and those around us, reflects our spiritual character. God is training us and revealing what we are really like. He lets us know where we stand in relation to Him by constantly testing our spiritual character! The final test of our character is **our fruits** - how we live, what we say, what we do. It involves the totality of our being! What we really are.

**Re 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.**

**11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.**

1. Because you have kept
   1. **Because thou hast kept the word of my patience**
   2. My command to persevere,
   3. I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.