



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

October 8, 2023

Pastor James Enderle

19th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 25 CW

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 13:5-8](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 21:28-32](#)

Our God... Test Your Faith

1. Test _____ not _____
2. Through _____ you are _____ in Christ
 - a. A test of _____ not _____
 - b. A life of _____ not _____
 - c. A life of _____ not _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

When you hear the word "test," what do you think? If you're still in school, grade school, high school, college, you might cringe. Having to study, having to test to see what you know. If you're not good at studying and doing your homework all the time, maybe it's the fear of having to cram and try to learn as much as you can to not get a bad grade. Tests aren't always fun in school.

What about when you're older and you're not in school anymore, what do you think about when you hear the word "test"? I think the most common thing when you have a test when you're older has to do with something medical. You have examinations and something might be wrong, so they are going to run some tests to see what comes back. It's always nerve-wracking to see if the test results are good or bad. The idea of testing isn't always something that makes us happy. It's more something that is nerve-wracking and kind of fearful.

Today Paul is going to encourage us to **test our faith**, to examine ourselves. As we look at this, we are going to see what this means about our faith and repentance and what it has to do with Christ as well.

As we begin and look at testing, it's kind of interesting how Paul gets to this point. The letters of [1 Corinthians](#) and [2 Corinthians](#) is him speaking to a congregation that he knows well. He spent a good amount of time there and he cares for these people so much, so he wrote to them. In [1 Corinthians](#) he spoke about so many different things about congregational life and what it means to be a Christian. He also called them out about some pretty bad sins that were going on in the church and how the people were even boasting about that sin.

In the meantime, between this letter and [2 Corinthians](#), there are some people that start to sway the people. They start to say "You know what? Paul writes pretty strongly. He speaks the big word, but in person, he is pretty meek and mild. Even though we didn't pay him and he didn't ask for money from us, we gave him money to pay for help for some people in Jerusalem. He probably took some money from that offering. He is not that great of an apostle. His words aren't that great and he really isn't that great of a guy." The people were testing Paul and were telling the people "You should test him and see that he falls short." So throughout the letter of [2 Corinthians](#), Paul is writing to them and has a lot of strong words to defend himself. The people who opposed him, he calls them the super apostles. They are starting to lead the people astray and lead them especially away from the Gospel. In the verses and chapters that precede [Chapter 13](#), Paul really goes into a defense of himself, kind of testing himself. He says how he has suffered from the Gospel in all the ways that Christ had called him and that he really doesn't care about money or any of these things. He just cares about them and their souls.

Then we get to our section here. He is saying "There is nothing good in me, but I boast in my weakness so I can trust in Christ." He then encourages them to do some testing. But what does he encourage them to do? He says (in Verse 5), ***"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."*** He is encouraging them to *test yourself and not others*. What is the truth? Just like those super apostles were testing Paul, what do we so often like to do? We don't like to look at ourselves and look at our flaws and test ourselves. We like to sit there in judgment of other people, to look at the sins that other people commit and say "How could they do that thing? That is so vile, so wretched! I could never do something like that." Yet we have our pet sins that we ignore and avoid. We refuse to look at the Law and test ourselves to see who we are. So God is saying "You so often love to test everyone else. You love to judge other people and compare yourselves to others and to not judge fairly, to not see yourselves truly, but to really look down on others, so test yourselves. Don't worry about everyone else. The super apostles here in Corinth are telling you to test Paul and focus on other people." Paul says to test ourselves.

What should we find when we test ourselves? He says, ***"Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test."*** What he is encouraging then is in these

next verses. ***“Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”*** As he is encouraging them to test themselves, what does he want them to find in themselves? The first thing he wants them to find is if Jesus Christ is in them. Why?

As we talk about testing ourselves and measuring ourselves up to the Law, what do we find? We find that we fall short. If this was a moral test, if this was anything else, we know that we'd be hopeless. So he says to test yourselves so that you will see *through faith you are perfect in Christ*. Test yourself and see if Jesus is in there, if you have faith, because that's what matters the most. All these other things cannot give hope. So if you're trying to earn your way, if you are trying to compare yourself to others or think "I'm not that bad" or "I can just try harder," it doesn't do any good. He reminds us that Christ has washed you clean and what you need to test and find is whether you have faith. Is Jesus Christ the one who is covering you in that robe of righteousness? That's the true test—to see that He is our Savior and our Redeemer. When you are struggling with sin to not say "I'll just try harder" or "It's not that big of a deal," but to repent and say "No! It is a big deal, but I have Jesus." To be driven to Jesus. The super apostles were teaching them to go away from the Gospel. He is saying you need Jesus. You need Jesus to remind you that you are perfect and forgiven. When we see that it is a test about faith and Jesus, we see what the test is really about.

As he talks about doing right and wrong, in Verse 8 he says, ***“For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”*** What kind of test is this? It's really a *test of truth not morality*. As we talked about it in Ezekiel, if this was a test of how obedient I was, how good I was, how would we do? How would you do if Jesus was testing you on your faithfulness every day and was saying "Hey, are you perfect?" We wouldn't do very well. We know that even with God's love and forgiveness, we fall short of being perfect in our daily life. We will always have that sin in our lives and be in this sinful world until we enter heaven, where there is no more sin. So it's not a test of morality. It's a test of truth.

We can be as good as we want. There are a lot of people in the world who are really good. But what are they putting their faith in? Themselves, different gods that offer no hope, and there are some religions where people might be better than Christians. Why? Because their foundation is not on a Savior and grace; their foundation is built on how they must earn their way to heaven. So people might look and say "Hey, those people are pretty good. I want to join that church." If that religion is all about you earning your way, there is a lot of fear and trepidation of how you have to be perfect. We know it's not about our perfection but about the truth that Christ is perfect for us.

We need to be in the Gospel and in Jesus, who says what? He says that He is the truth. Jesus is the truth, the way and the life. [\(John 14:6\)](#) He is your truth, the way that we get to heaven and what gives us eternal life. What happens is when we are led away from Jesus, we are led away from the Gospel, and then that leads us away from repentance because if I don't know I'm forgiven, if I don't know Jesus has forgiven my sins, I'm going to start saying "These things really aren't a big deal." If I don't have forgiveness for them, maybe I'll just start saying "Those aren't sins" and I'll say "Those big things are the only sins and I can avoid those big things and the little things, that's not sin." So I grow further away from repentance and hearing that I'm forgiven.

As he talks about what we are supposed to do, we are supposed to continue to seek Christ. What this looks like in our lives is maybe pointed out well by Martin Luther. In the first of his [95 Theses](#) he wrote this: When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," He intended that our entire life, the entire life of believers should be one of repentance. What is he saying there? He is saying that repentance doesn't just happen once. It's a life-long thing. We live in repentance. So as Christians, can we be perfect? No, we fall short but we live in repentance and it's *a life of repentance, not perfection*.

There are some perfectionists out there who get so frustrated when they make a mistake and say, "How could I do that?!" They become so frustrated and it bugs them all day. He is saying it's not about being perfect because you are perfect in Christ, but it is about a life of repentance. It's about daily turning to Christ and saying "I'm sorry. I know what you say is good and right and I know it's there to bless me and to keep me from sin and doing what is wrong and to help me love you, God, and to love others, so help me. Help me turn away from my sins, daily, to know that you love me and forgive me, and to pour my heart out to you and say 'I'm sorry,' so that I can hear those words of forgiveness and turn from my sins, to turn and do what is good and right out of love and thanks for Him." As it says, ***Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.*** People will point out and maybe say we look like hypocrites. "Everyone inside isn't always doing what they say." We all fall short. So we seek not to be like a hypocrite. We seek to turn away from that but we know we will fall short.

Even though we know we can't be perfect, does that mean there should be no fruits of faith or no fruits of repentance? Paul is telling them to seek to do good, to seek that repentance, and to test our faith. When we are filled with Christ, then we will have fruits of repentance. What does that look like? It looks like *a life of progress not perfection*. There are some people that say we can't be perfect, so that means we don't have to try. Or what some will accuse Lutherans of—"You put away the Law and you say you are saved by grace and faith alone, so it doesn't matter what you do." I'm saved by grace so according to my salvation, I can do nothing to earn God's love, but God asks me to repent and to show fruits of faith. So it's on the other side of things—not to be perfect

but not to say "I don't have to do anything." As I'm in God's Word, I want to follow and be doing what God asks me to do. What allows me to do that? The Holy Spirit and being in His Word, learning what is good and right, and being filled with the Gospel. But when I'm encouraged that it's not about me being perfect, that's progress. To take steps and to know that I can, through God's strength, turn away from sin. I can say no to things.

When we look at our life, we know that there are temptations and struggles that sometimes feel like it's too hard to say no to them—addiction or all these different struggles that we have, those pet sins that we just keep on doing. But God says through His Word, through His Holy Spirit, we can say no to sin.

It's similar to the conference I went to recently, the Cross Training Conference, the Pastor mentoring program where we encourage and talk about our spiritual, physical, emotional resiliency. A lot of it was talking about our physical life of just being healthy. If you tried to diet and to eat, how hard is it to say no to the foods you love to eat, those sugary foods? It's hard! But knowing that when you do those things it might feel good for a little while but maybe you'll feel bad tomorrow and then understanding that my physical health is actual a spiritual thing as well, that can help me say no to things. It's a thing that I'm telling myself and I'm trying to lose some pounds. I can say no to things. It's not easy, but it is progress. It's not that I'm going to be perfect in that and that I can do that all at once, but God helps us.

While that's just a physical thing, it happens in our spiritual lives too. Ask God to strengthen you and help you to know that this is all because Christ has already given us His perfection. We talked about this in our Sunday Night Bible Study where we know the truth—it's not about our performance. The rest of the world says it's all about what you do that gives you your verdict. An example of this was in the book. It's a book called The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness. It quotes Madonna. Madonna, one of the most successful musicians in the 80s-90s, said she always had to do something new to show that she was somebody, otherwise she felt like she was nobody. She had to keep performing. She had to keep feeling special, otherwise she felt like nothing. She had to keep getting a verdict.

What's true for Christianity is it's different. Unlike the rest of the world where if you want a raise, you have to show your performance to get the verdict; if you want to be a starter on the team, you have to show your performance in games and practices to get the verdict, the truth is that in Christianity, it is different. It's unique. By faith in Christ we are perfect. Christianity is the only thing that gives us this verdict first and then the performance follows. We're not perfect because of our work and the progress because we're already perfect in Christ. Because I know I'm loved and forgiven in Christ, then I can love Him back and love others and not have to feel burdened to earn anything from Him. I know that He can use me for His good, to serve others, and that repenting and

being in His Word and turning from sin is only good and right, and His Law and His Word are things that are meant to love us and to help us to love one another.

So as we test ourselves, it's not this huge test of how good you are or how perfect you are. It's a test of faith—is Jesus in there? Do you know you are forgiven and perfect in Christ? And then to live in that life of repentance knowing daily I can turn to Him and be forgiven, and daily He can fill me up with the motivation and love to serve Him and to serve others so that others may, too, know of His great love and mercy. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.