

Easter 5B – Prepared to test

1. All of us as parents hope to prepare our children for what they will face in the “real” world when they grow up.
 - a. Of course, we want them to be happy and satisfied in the life they’ve chosen
 - i. We may have wishes that we would like to see fulfilled in them but we know that they might not share that vision.
 - ii. My father wanted me to be an attorney or a professor in the worst way, thought I would be well-suited for them, maybe I would have been, but I didn’t share that vision
 - b. But regardless of what path our children take we want them to be ready for the world.
 - i. That preparation occurs in the family by how the family lives and what it values.
 - ii. We send our kids to school to learn and play sports to understand the value of teamwork and fair-play, etc.
2. So, it shouldn’t be any surprise that our Christian family, which we have been talking about for the past two weeks, should also prepare you for the world.
 - a. That’s what John is doing in this section of his letter – preparing his readers for what they will face.
 - i. And he begins with, **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”** (1Jn 4:1)
 - ii. This is one of the first lessons we tell our kids and if they don’t learn it from us they learn soon enough on their own - not everyone can be trusted
 - iii. We all must learn how to evaluate the claims that are made in the world or we’ll be easy prey, we learn to test what we hear.
 - b. In the spiritual realm we know that the world is full of many purveyors of so-called spiritual “truth”.
 - i. The message always comes with obligatory outward marks of spirituality and piety, but the substance is bad.
 - ii. His isn’t the only voice of caution, our Lord told His disciples, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.”** (Mat 7:15-16)
 - iii. And Peter says this in his second epistle, **“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master.”** (2Pe 2:1)
 - iv. In the church as in the world there have always been those who hope to serve themselves by leading others astray.

- c. John then offers one standard we can still use, **“By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.”** (1Jn 4:2-3)
 - i. The false teaching that John was talking about was prevalent in the early church based on a mind-set heavily influenced by Greek culture.
 - ii. Greek thought since Plato’s time divided reality between the spiritual world, which was ideal and the physical world which was inferior.
 - iii. The thought that God who is spiritual would condescend to become flesh and blood in Jesus was rejected as absurd.
 - iv. So, a teaching developed that Jesus only appeared to have a body throughout His ministry which would make the teaching about Jesus birth false, etc undermining our faith.
- 3. But the point is that false teachings and false teachers have existed as long as the Church has existed, and he says they are motivated by the same being - Satan.
 - a. John says this in verse 3, **“This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”**
 - i. We live in a spiritual reality and an earthly reality – if the Greeks were too far spiritual as to deny reality we’ve gone too far materially and deny the spiritual
 - ii. It’s probably a mistake to look for Satan behind every rock and crevice but the safest place for him to operate is where people deny that he exists.
 - iii. Scripture is very clear that we are opposed by an enemy we could not defeat on our own but was overcome by the cross, but he continues to seek to disrupt the church and destroy our faith.
 - iv. As Peter tells us, **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”** (1Pe 5:8)
 - b. And he tells us that our opponents have an earthly advantage, **“They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.”** (1 Jn 4:5)
 - i. Many false teachers are in the world today calling for peace with the world and acceptance of lifestyles and activities that we know are not Scriptural
 - ii. The people of the sinful world eat it up because they fail to appreciate their own sinfulness because the world is so full of evil.
 - iii. When you’re barraged with story after story of murder, rape, kidnapping, etc your own sins look pretty insignificant in comparison.
 - iv. Even as Christians we have to remain on guard against that kind of false security
 - c. So, when the true church presents a message of repentance and salvation to the outside world it’s actually pretty offensive!

- i. Think about it...if you're being told you don't sin, why on earth do you need a Savior?
 - ii. The Gospel might sound like Good News to us, who are born again and see the world through the eyes of faith.
 - iii. But imagine the perceived audacity of a call to change your life if you don't think you're in trouble in the first place.
 - iv. So, it's not surprising as our culture slips further away from a biblical understanding of right and wrong/good and bad, that the world increasingly views the church and its message as hostile and unwelcomed, and rejects what we say.
- d. But John also reminds us that while we face headwinds in the world we already know the outcome of the war and we are the victors through Christ!
- i. He say, **"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."** (1Jn 4:4)
 - ii. Our victory was won for us not through anything we've done but rather what Christ has done for us.
 - iii. As you have heard me say many times before the cross isn't just an instrument through which our sins have been forgiven, it was an instrument of war, spiritual war.
 - iv. Again, listen to Paul in Colossians, **"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."** (Col 2:13-15)
- e. Dearly beloved in the Lord these things are written that you may be ready to face world with your eyes wide open!
- i. That you would live your lives confident that regardless of the battle raging around you Christ has overcome the forces of evil.
 - ii. And He has prepared You through His Word that you do not fall prey to every winsome voice that you hear but like those who have been trained you can test the spirits to see if they are of God.