

March 19

“TESTING TRUTH”

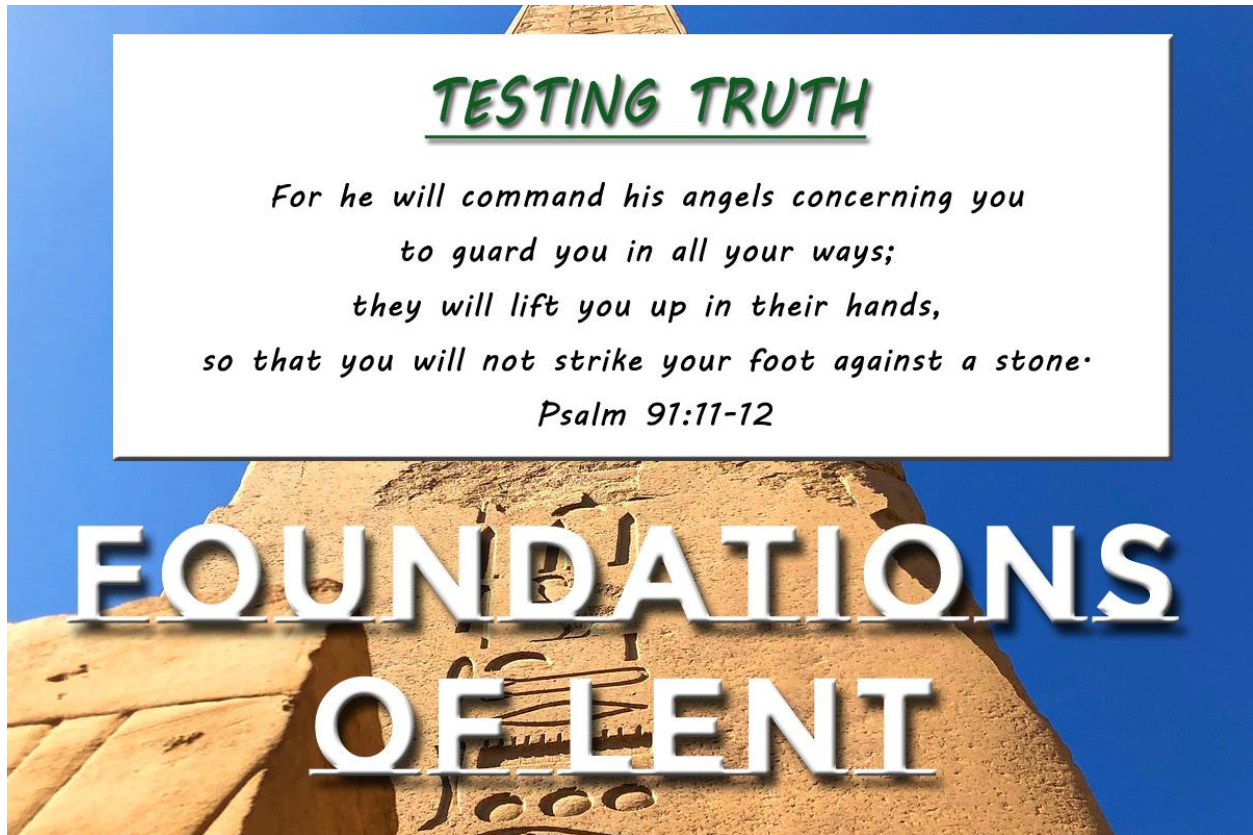
Psalm 91:11-12

Special Music:

“Shut De Do Medley”

The Martins/Gaither

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90lqlbRuiJY>



Psalm 91

11 For he will command his angels concerning you

to guard you in all your ways;

12 they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

THE TRUTH IN ANGELS

“There’s no such things as angels,”
The village prophet said.
“It’s just imagination
Dancin’ through your head.
You’re weak and narrow minded,
An idiot born and bred.
Can’t see this biz for what it is.
And embrace the lie instead.”

“I know that there are angels,”
I answered in return.
“And when it comes to doubting,
I hope I never learn
To bend the truth to meet my needs
To address my self-concern
There’s lack of proof in your self-spun truth
You cannot make me turn.”

“What makes you believe in angels?”
The angry prophet cried.
“What makes you stand so firm on this
And unable to deny,
That angels simply don’t exist.
It must be your selfish pride.
You’ve grabbed the veil of a mythic tale
And ride astride a lie.”

“Not true, not true!” I answered
I see them every day,
Revealing to all the grace of God
As they reach out to all that stray.
I see them mending broken hearts
And in the eyes of babes,
Broken bowls and shattered souls
As they gather strength to pray.

I see them tending to the sick
And setting spirits free.
I see them feeding hungry folk
As they listen to their plea,
I see them watching over us,
They help to calm the sea,
But most of all I hear their call,
For they are sent to cover me.

It is in episode seventeen of the highly watched series, “The X-Files,” when Dana Scully turns to Fox Mulder and says those oft quoted words, “Mulder, the truth is out there. But so are lies.” When the line is quoted, that last part is often left out. We want to believe that “The truth is out there.” We want to know that our belief in the possibility of ultimate answers is not only possible, but just beyond our fingertips. And we also believe that if we accept the fact that there are lies out there as well, those lies might possibly keep us from finding the truth.

Truth is like a foundation, immutable and unmovable. It is steadfast against tempests and time. It is fixed, responsible and unshaken; something that stands against the tempests. It can be trusted to never change. Since it never moves, we can always find it if we look for it.

Lies, on the other hand, are like living organisms; foul creatures born out of darkness and clinging to the shadows. They are tied to some semblance of truth which makes them appear to be genuine. They slither and move, never staying in one place. And if we try to shine light on them to see them for what they are, they crawl back into the shadows, only to appear somewhere else. Lies want us to put our faith in the things of this earth because we can see them, touch them, hear them, taste them, and smell them. That alone makes them appear to be true.

But truth is not afraid of the light. Instead, it welcomes it. It is difficult to ignore truth when it stands before us, naked in the light, scars revealed of battles won and lies defeated.

And yet, the human nature inside of us is constantly being drawn back towards the darkness. We know we aren't perfect, and we worry that the lies and missteps in our lives will be revealed when we step into the light. And we worry about what will happen when we stand exposed. We become afraid that people and even God might reject us. But that is part of what makes the Great Lie the Great Lie. Satan makes us feel this way. He wraps the truth of God's love and forgiveness into something that he can manipulate and turn against us. There is nothing that we can hide from God. But satan wants to make us believe that we can. Remember the sin of David trying to hide his adultery? And then trying to cover it up? And then committing murder by proxy? And still he believed he could hide it all from God.

Until he couldn't. Until God's light revealed all that David had done. It is only when David acknowledges all that he has done and pleads for forgiveness that he finds how merciful our Creator is, even though God knew what David was doing all along. Unlike people, God can see into the darkness. Even when we do our best to hide from Him. Adam knew this. Jonah knew this. So many people over millennia have tried to hide from God and failed.

It is God's light and truth that exposes satan's lies, but we have to want truth more than we want the lies. Too often, satan's lies are convenient, easier to listen to, and require less critical thinking to accept as fact. We don't want to put in the work to see if truth is actually truth. That requires time, prayer, and patience. God provides the light and the tools, but we don't want to be bothered. We will often accept the first truth that comes along, even if it fails to meet the

criteria of truth. And there are times that we will accept what is perceived as truth simply because it is exactly what we are looking for. But that is also a false test for truth.

Think about this. Jesus is in the desert and very hungry. If he turns the stones to bread to meet His own needs, then He will be creating a truth that is contrary to the truth God wants for Him. It will fill His belly but will not meet all the requirements that He is needing. He doesn't just need bread. He needs time alone with God. He needs to be totally dependent on His Father for His needs. If He does it for Himself, He gets none of that. He falls short. It will not be as fulfilling as if He waited so that God and the angels could lavish on Him all the things that He needed rather than just some bread to appease His hunger.

The same is true as we look at the second temptation. Satan takes Jesus to the top of a temple and dares Him to throw Himself off as an act of faith. After all, Satan reminds Jesus that Psalms 91 says:

11 For he will command his angels concerning you

to guard you in all your ways;

12 they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

Do you remember your parents telling you what a fool you were and then adding, "if all your friends threw themselves off a bridge, would you do it, too?" Jesus responds to Satan with another verse out of Deuteronomy, verse 6:16 which reads like this:

“Do not put the LORD your God to the test (as you did at Massah).“

When Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew, he does not end the verse as it ends in Deuteronomy, the “as you did at Massah” part. Jesus does not have to explain that to satan, but I think we need to dwell on it for a minute to understand what he is referring to, especially if we do not understand what it means to test God.

Why this verse? Again, not one of the Ten Commandments. And what happened at Massah? Why is it so important? Keep following me here because this is how we understand the importance of what Jesus is talking about. This verse in Deuteronomy, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah” is a reference to Numbers 14. Moses had once again come before the Lord and is interceding for the people. And God says to Moses:

20 The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked.

21 Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth,

22 not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—

23 not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

What God is saying here is what Jesus will use to respond to satan. **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test”** is a reference to what occurred at Massah. I see God shouting in a booming voice, “I have proven over and over who I am, even though I shouldn’t have to. I performed miracle after miracle in Egypt. I then brought you out of Egypt, safely averting battle the mighty Egyptian army,

parting the sea so that you could escape, performing more miracles even now, here in the desert, and still, you so not believe. Still, you put me to the test. You remain a stiff-necked people. But now, your lack of faith and trust will come with a cost.”

So, as Jesus would later say, **“Do not put the LORD your God to the test.”**

There may come a point where he lets us wallow in the beds we’ve made. Beds of faithlessness and foolishness. Beds not meant to punish us, but beds to bring us into alignment with God’s will, where we are placed into a position of total dependance on our Creator. God will never push us away, but He will do whatever it takes to bring us closer, even if it is to point out our wicked ways and lack of faith.

We get everything backwards sometimes because we forget whom we are dealing with. If we truly believe that God is who He says He is, then it is not God who needs to prove His loyalty to us, but us who needs to prove our loyalty to Him. God is not the given to breaking promises. It is us who are stiff-necked. It is us who turn our backs on Him when it becomes inconvenient to follow Him or do what He asks us to do.

When satan tells Jesus to throw Himself off the top of the temple, there is no benefit for anyone by Him doing so, except perhaps satan. Once again, Jesus knows that God is His Father and that the Holy Spirit is with Him. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit both know that Jesus is God’s son. No spoiler there. So, the only one that benefits by Jesus throwing Himself off the heights of the temple is satan. Jesus sees no sense in it. Jesus isn’t going to commit this sin just because everyone else might do it if they were in his shoes. Again, would you throw yourself off a bridge just because all your friends were doing it?

Have you noticed that this is the only temptation where there is nothing tangible offered to Jesus. In the first temptation, he would at least have bread to

eat for his troubles. In the third temptation, satan offers him the entire world. But this second temptation is like playing “double dare you” with no wagers involved.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down.”

Matthew 4:5-6

But satan is wrong in his thinking that Jesus has doubts about who he is. Satan is the last one Jesus needs to prove anything to, and throwing Himself off the temple wouldn't prove anything. Jesus has no doubt as to who His Father is. So, the only one left hanging here is satan.

Which begs the question, how does this manifest itself in our Christian lives? What does this truth look like to others? How is it perceived by non-believers or those who have fallen away?

Have you ever met a person who you know is Christian even before they open their mouths? There is just somehow a peace about them and the essence of wisdom covering them. The Spirit is shining out from them and somehow you know that you can trust them. There is a truth that rests within them.

Let me read you a passage from 1st John. This letter is written by John the Apostle to Gaius. We don't know much about Gaius, but what we do know is that he had made it his mission to provide food and shelter for traveling missionaries. He took care of those who were spreading the word. Here is what John says in verses 3 & 4:

It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Some believers had encountered Gaius' ministry to missionaries and had returned back to Jerusalem. They told John about the wonderful work that Gaius was doing and how he was such a wonderful example of walking in the truth.

How do our lives live up to that example? Do people encounter us in the world and when they leave us tell others how Jesus is using us? Is their encounter with us a positive encounter with Christ Himself? That is how God's truth should affect us. We should radiate his message of caring for others. We should not have to run around performing miracles in order for people to see Christ dwelling in us. I say this because we are living, breathing miracles ourselves that God has chosen to move in this world and bring others close to Him. God has even given us the miracle of the Holy Spirit living through us. We have nothing to prove to anyone. Our joy is in our service to the one who created us. Our joy is in serving His children.

As far as testing truth, allow me to say this. We don't need to test truth. Truth stands whether we test it or not. Like I explained in the beginning of this message, it doesn't move. It doesn't change. Truth "is." If we find ourselves testing truth, it was probably never truth to begin with. It is lies that need to be tested. It is lies that change and wrap themselves around us in an effort to confuse us.

Stand firm in your faith. Stand firm in truth. Don't be deceived by satan trying to weave the lies of this earth into the truth of heaven. Jesus is our rock and our foundation and cannot be moved.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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