

*Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020 10 am*

Standing the test in exile

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Welcome back	Read intro
Opening prayer	
Opening Hymn	MP 631 Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AI_q4uEJqS0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AI_q4uEJqS0</a>
Scripture Reading	Deut 8
Prayer	
Testimony time	
Reading	Ps 137, 126
Hymn	MP 522 O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Sermon Title:	Standing the test in exile
Closing hymn	MP 579 Restore Oh Lord the honour of your name
<i>Retiring offering on box</i>	
Closing prayer	
Close	-----

Listen to today's sermon by clicking on the link at [www.knbc.org](http://www.knbc.org).The audio file is [20\\_07\\_19.mp3](#) in the sermons directory*Exordium - testing*

Welcome to KNBC. This week we start back at the Chapel, a cause for rejoicing! Some however, will be listening to this online and we are so glad you can and hope to see you at the chapel when you are able. Let's Pray

- It has happened to you, you've been out shopping, you go through the checkout, put everything in your bags and then you discover the lady has given you an extra £5 in your change, what do you do?
- Or you are now outside the shop, or are just got into the car when you discover the extra money? What do you do? Do you just carry on? It's so easy to, it would be an effort to go back in,
- or you've arrived home and then you discover the extra money, what then? Would you, did you make the effort to go back?

Life is full of tests, but tests for me before I became a Christian where easy. There was no concern to honour God, and little concern for honesty, the money would have stayed in the pocket, I would even have bragged about it. Now, as a follow of Christ it is very different. God's Spirit desires righteousness in me, I'm bothered to respond rightly at all times and in all situations. Christ stirs me and molds me. I'm now determined to make every part of my being subject to my new master - that I will do his will.

That is why God tests you and I, I hope we realize that! **Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years**, yes we should remember and why did he do that? **to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands** De 8:2

In other words would God's people – through all the difficulties –trust Him? Trust Him to provide for them - and would they continue to follow Him?

**I believe this Covid-19 and the lockdown has been a test for God's people.**

**.. there's a Bible parallel that speaks to this, we will be looking in a moment.**

That God tests his people is a recurring theme in the Bible. Uncomfortable truths, learned through self-discovery, are lessons well learned.

- So when at the checkout they've missed an item off... I quickly see my own heart, or in the shop you see someone you know, you know them quite well but you would rather not talk, so you pretend you haven't seen them, they haven't seen you, it's easy to avoid them but you know you should speak to them.
- Or you have to visit someone you would be happy not to, and as you are about to go it starts to drizzle – tempted to just leave it?

- You have decided to come to the evening service but then someone comes round – Ah, I could use this as a legitimate reason not to go.

God's tests - reveal my heart to Him – and my heart to myself! It's an instant x-ray of my heart and its desires. Now in the raw I see the clear truth of myself. It's a valued snapshot make the most of it - as it is quickly gone.

- Remember the old 'film' cameras? With the film out you could put your head in the film box and press the button, there's a sudden opening of light – and it is quickly gone.

That is what tests do the shed light into our dark hearts. Testing is normal for a Christian. Abraham was tested, so Isaac, Jacob and all the people of God, in the desert, David and so on. The people of God are tested by the Lord - and why?? **to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands** De 8:2

**So the sermon this morning is about our current time of testing. The Covid-19 fear and the lockdown restriction and isolation. How has it been for you?**

In the Bible a great test for God's people was when they were forced into exile. There is much in the Bible about this, including Ps 137 and 126.

Let me give a brief summary of what happened. When God rescued the people of God from their hard slavery in Egypt and set them free, he made a deal with them a covenant, "you will be my people and I will be your God". Here are my commandments, these commandments reflect how I am, so if you keep them you will know my rich blessing, - if you ignore them you will know misery upon misery. The copious writings of the prophets catalogue the sad saga of His people who again and again turn away from God. They also recall God's loving warnings and His great patience.

However, enough was enough and the old prediction finally came to pass. God punished them by sending them off 'far away' to Babylon. There they stayed for a couple of generations. What they thought would never happen – happened, Jerusalem the symbol of God's presence, the one place they were to meet with God, was overrun and destroyed.

The destruction of temple signaled the end of worship. God's people were now banished to live amongst the heathen, a daily reminder of how they had been living. What would they think of that? How would they now live? How would it affect their devotion and love for God?

What happened to them could be put into 4 sections: Remove, Remember, Return, Restore. That is they were removed from Jerusalem their one place

of worship, Would they remember God from far away? Would they take the option to return when it came? and would they restore worship and witness?

Although the time and place was different, there are still some similarities to our current situation. The reason was also different, it was a punishment for their disregard of God's laws, and we do not see our situation like that – although there may be some of that – whatever the cause of it – it is a test. How will we now live? How will it affect my devotion and love for God?

## Test 1 - Remove

God's people in being sent far off where not able to worship God as they should. So we were told in March "the church is closed, we cannot meet and worship together as we should"

How did you react? What were your thoughts when the church was closed?

For me as I printed off the posters and put them on the door and window of the church – I was thinking "I bet this is the first time the chapel has been closed for nearly two hundred years". Switch the heating off, & walk away.

"How will this affect my love for the Lord, how much would I miss it? I will have to make new arrangements for giving. How will I honour and give Him the worship He is due? How could I/we maintain the fellowship and love for my brothers and sisters? How would it affect my zeal for the Lord?

How about you? When you were told "you cannot meet" did you hear it as "now I don't have to". Did it make you ask why you come to church? Is it under compulsion? Are you a child in a family and only come dutifully because you ought to?

It's always a test when you are told you can't do something, or you have something taken away.

- The test of the Bonfire "it's over" no more bonfires although I have been having them for 30 years here.

Maybe that's not such a big deal

- Footballer who is told that the seemingly small injury means he will never play football again!

✚ When something is taken away - are you more determined?

How did you see not being able to go to worship with your brothers and sisters in the Lord? Did it bother you? There's the test of your heart.

Did you in a way 'let it go' or 'give up' [[ God looked at his people:

**“You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? Have you like those there lost your enthusiasm, it does reveal our heart.**

**Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name.”** Mal 3:14-16 ]]

So

## Test 2 – to Remember

Those in Babylon were 700/800 miles away, did they forget? Where they now caught up in where they were?

**“1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.**

**2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" 4 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?**

They felt it acutely, they were grieved over what had happened and vowed to remember.

How is your memory? Do you need to knot the hanky and remember what the Lord has done for you lest you forget God’s wonderful grace to you.

When the trans Jordan tribes returned to the east side of the Jordan they built an altar, not for sacrifice but to remember that they were one with those on the west side of the Jordan and together in the worship of the one true God.

What did you do when you could serve at the church? Or meet up with your brothers and sisters? Did you make extra effort? Those far off in Babylon vowed **5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. 6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.**

**✚ Don’t lose your zeal, don’t forget to whom you belong, don’t become lukewarm when it comes to the things of God.**

**Do not be lacking in zeal but keep your spiritual fervour** Paul says to the Christians,

How do you keep your spiritual fervour?

The difficulties in Lockdown affected people in different ways, it showed up our weak spots. But remember the Lord is sufficient, His grace is sufficient

3a

matching every situation. He has given his spirit to comfort and strengthen his people, So also His precious word, so also prayer by which we draw close and through which he refreshes my spirit.

The Lord is so gracious to us and said **“Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.”** Eze 11:16

## Test 3 - Return

The time came for all those exiled to Babylon to be able to return.

So for us the time for the long awaited return to church has come.

For God’s people meeting up with others should be in our DNA, our heartbeat. Not just an ingrained discipline, - but a sought after blessing.

God amazingly reversed everything and moved the heart of Kings Cyrus to allow those in exile from Israel to return to Jerusalem. He not only allowed them to return but gave every assistance. Some came back with Zerubbabel, Ezra and later Nehemiah.

And yet while they could return, and many did return, some decided to stay where they were.

Not every Israelite returned – quite a few stayed, You see that in the later book of Esther. There were fair numbers who had become settled where they were. Maybe the journey was too long. It would cause too much of a disruption to their settled way of life. That was their test. Was the loss of their comforts, the upheaval and the hardship of the journey outweighed by their desire to return to the one place and way God was to be worshipped???

They became so absorbed in the country they lived in - they became Jews in name only and if we are not careful we can become Christians in name only.

■ [The new internet alternative, \(not possible 5/10 years ago\) has it become an acceptable alternative, dare I say an easy alternative.](#)

There are some tests, if there’s no Sunday morning rush to get ready what of personal preparation? I mean as we do when preparing to meet with the Lord in His house and with His people? Has that fallen away?

What of the connection between inner preparation and outward preparation?

Does getting ready to meet with the Lord shown in getting ready in the morning in other ways? Attention to dress is wrong, that is not the focus, but does sitting listening to a sermon on the edge of your bed or coming down still in your pajamas signal a true concern to meet with God?

3b

With the lockdown easing and churches opening, some have concerns, come and tell us so we can make the best arrangements. We want to make coming to church less a risk of catching the virus than any other visits you make, shops or otherwise.

✚ Again it is a test for me and my motives.

## Test 4 - Restore

Those who returned to Jerusalem had a lot to do: a lot to restore. Two things

Restore worship - and restore witness:

1. Restoring worship - rebuilding the temple.
2. Restore witness - rebuilding of the wall.

### Restoring worship

The first task on returning to a very broken down Jerusalem was to start rebuilding. The place above all that signified God's presence was the temple. And that was to be rebuilt. Yet before that even, before there was anything on the temple mount they rebuilt the Altar.

It is the Altar where sacrifices are made. It is here where they could seek forgiveness for their sins and know the gift of forgiveness from God.

As the altar was the centre of worship – so the cross is the centre of our worship. This is the meeting place with God the place where we see the holiness of God - the seriousness of sin - the love of God in the painful sacrifice of His son for me - and the freedom forgiveness brings.

That set a man or women in a right place before his God

✚ The Altar, as with the cross is the great sign of God's amazing grace to us as sinners. Now we can receive Grace God's good gifts at Christ's expense. There I can receive a heart to love my God and Saviour.

God then commanded the temple to be rebuilt. But His people gave up part the way through and went back to their own homes. They failed the test and God had to chastise them "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Haggai 1:4

✚ They gave in - and gave up, let us not give up but spur each other on.

Will you count your blessings and rejoice to be in the church of God's Son. "When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions. Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple." Ps 65:3-4

### Restoring witness – the wall

Lastly and briefly some time later under the leadership of Nehemiah, and amidst huge opposition, the gaping gaps in the walls around Jerusalem were filled - and the whole wall and gates completed – and all in record time.

To rebuild the wall was to show the distinctiveness, the separateness of God Holy People. Before that there was nothing to tell apart who was in and who was out. The wall drew the line. Here is a picture of the gospel. The cross draws the line. The Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of the cross. No-one comes in, to be inside, to be one of God's people except by the cross of Christ.

So as we return may we not return a weak indistinct church. The Devil is very happy to have churches on every street corner - as long as they have the closed sign up.

✚ These are testing times, and a test for us together and a test individually.

Ps 17:3 **Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin.**

Ps 26:2 **Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind;**

The church is to be salt as well as light. Where is the Godly voice to the nation - this time of testing is also an opportunity? Where is our saltiness? Who will warn that unless there is a repentance from ignoring God's commands then greater judgments are coming.

Tests aren't easy, it wouldn't be a test if so. In returning the £5 you have a chance to speak of a God of truth. Let us also as we are able speak of a God of Holiness, A God of justice - but also the God of great Grace  
May God help us to be both light and salt.

To be able to return should fill us will joy. Ps 126 - "When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."

3. There is a great Joy in restoration. when worship is restored Christ is honoured - and I am restored,
4. When witness is restored Christ is honoured - and I am restored, I am strengthened.

During Covid God is testing us: in the Removing, the Remembering, now the Returning, and now the Restoring. At every turn there's a test. \_\_\_END