

Test the Spirits

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 March 2011

Preacher: Jonathan Smith

[0 : 0 0] a little bit earlier we're going through the book of one John at the moment at the church we tend to work through whole books of the Bible and so we're on a journey through the first letter of John just to bring up to speed with what we've discovered so far we heard that John was one of Jesus three best friends one of his earliest followers and after Jesus died and was raised and then ascended to heaven John went about his work spreading the good news about Jesus and planting churches and so these letters that we're looking at the first of which we're looking at now one John is written to his church and then a bunch of churches around his church and there's there's a couple of big things that are on his mind as he writes number one is that there are a bunch of people who are in his church members of his church and then they left his church and started teaching that Jesus wasn't really God that Jesus never really died on the cross in fact some of them were saying that Jesus wasn't really a human being he just appeared that way and so they were denying the very foundations of Christianity the foundations of the gospel so he's really freaked out about this and so he's writing to these churches saying stand firm in the truth remember the truth of the gospel Jesus is God's son he died on the cross for our sins he was raised again for our salvation hold on to those truths and then around that he's sort of been encouraging those people in those churches that they are real true genuine Christians see these false teachers were saying you know you're not a real Christian if you believe in Jesus you don't really love God if you follow Jesus and so John's trying to say no listen you're you are you're the genuine article you believe the truth about Jesus you can call yourself a Christian and one thing he does by way of sort of encouragement to them and to us to encourage them that their faith is real he gives them three tests and they're not three tests that he expects any Christian to fail they're three tests that he expects will encourage us we've seen that these three tests are as follows the first one is the test of truth

John says if you're a Christian you love the truth and by the truth he means the gospel he means that truth that I was talking about Jesus Christ died on a cross raised again for our salvation need to love that truth the second test that proves that you're a Christian is the morality test he says if you're a Christian if you've been saved if you follow Jesus then every day you should be trying to live as Jesus lived for him to be your example and he says that throughout your life you should be turning away from sin turning away from darkness and sinfulness and turning towards Jesus trying to follow him he says none of us will ever be perfect every one of us is a sinner everyone in this room fails but the point is that each day we ought to be living more and more like Jesus and asking God to forgive us when we sin so that's the morality test and the third one and he expects us to pass all of these tests not just one or two but all of them he says is the test of love and I reckon this is at the forefront of his mind as he's writing this letter and the test of love is this and we saw this last week particularly he says if you're a Christian if you claim to follow Jesus you must love one another last week he really summed up the big idea that Jesus had in his teaching you remember Jesus in his sermon on the mount he summed up all of the commandments in the bible all the things we just heard in that Leviticus reading along with all the other commandments and he said listen you can sum them all up in this love God and love your neighbor as yourself that's the big idea and so John says if you want if you want to claim to be a Christian if you want to pass that test if you want to prove yourself to be genuine you must love God and love your neighbor as yourself remember last week he said if you hate someone it's like murdering them he's got no category for just disliking someone he says you either love someone or you hate them and Christians ought to love their brothers and sisters and indeed their neighbors that is everyone around them so as we were walking through John I was I was really praying and hoping that God would encourage us if you're a Christian here tonight I hope that you've been encouraged that as you love the truth and as you love holiness and as you love one another you're reminded about God's great work in your own heart in bringing you to faith you'd be encouraged that you are indeed a follower of Jesus now tonight he switches gears a little bit he's not going to be talking about how to test if someone's a

Christian but he's going to be testing by giving us tests to see if a teacher is a true teacher or a false teacher see if a teacher is teaching the truth that they are of God that they have the words of God or to see if they're a false teacher remember like the false teachers in his own church who seek to lead people astray who seek to belittle the truth about Jesus who seek to divide churches and lead a lead away people who claim to follow him so that's what where we're going to be tonight you notice in the reading that he only talks about this for a little bit a bunch of verses and then he goes back to talking about love he's always on about love he loves love right but we've talked about that for about four weeks now and i'm hoping you get the idea that we ought to be loving one another and loving God okay so we're not going to dwell on that tonight even though some of the greatest phrases in the bible are in that section we're not going to go there we're going to focus on what it means to test the spirits what it means to test teachers to see if they're genuine true biblical gospel teachers i'm going to pray for us if you want to pray with me just bow your head bow your head i'm going to ask that God would help us to understand his word father we do thank you so much for your grace to us in the lord jesus we also thank you that you've given us your word which is perfect for our instruction our correction our training in righteousness well we thank you so much that you speak to us every time we pick up your word and so we pray tonight that you would speak clearly to us that you give us some tools about how to work out whether someone is a godly teacher or a false teacher you'd encourage us in our faith that though we face many trials many temptations and though we're opposed by many evil spirits your holy spirit has overcome them all so i pray that you would be encouraged tonight as we look at your word we pray for jesus sake amen all right so i've uh i've been in two conversations with strangers this week who have told me that they love jesus i'm going to tell you about them first of all the first conversation i had was on monday down in rosebud um we were down there for a staff conference and chris and i were down in that sort of main street of rosebud and we're trying to scope out some places for us to go and have dinner together and uh so we were talking about jesus which is all your pastors do by the way we just talk about jesus and we pray and read our bible and fast every day so you know all right so we were talking about jesus and we just heard from behind us this woman with a loud screechy voice say i friggin love jesus we turned around and there was this woman standing there and i think she had a couple of kids in like a cart she was pushing along or something but and and and she was she was unique i mean she she was covered in tattoos one of which was a picture of jesus and uh she also had track marks on her arms which i assumed were from injecting something and uh she had a shaved head and a little rat's tail going down the back there all right and she was unique and so we got chatting to her and she said yeah i just love i love jesus uh the other person i spoke to who told me they love jesus was um was a very well-to-do well-spoken winsome charismatic guy in a suit and a tie short back and sides um just really outgoing lovely welcoming kind of guy told me he loved jesus one of the things that john has revealed to us throughout this book and indeed in his gospel that he wrote the fourth gospel of john is that appearances can be really deceptive

in fact jesus says himself i think it's matthew 7 15 he says that it warns us warns his disciples and warns us today that we will come across people who aren't who they seem to be he says that you will come across people who are like wolves in sheep's clothing that's where we get that saying from like wolves in sheep's clothing and jesus says they're going to appear on the outside to be loving caring harmless and on the inside they're going to be ravenous wolves who are going to look to tear you apart spiritually the reason i mentioned that uh is because john's going to talk about it tonight and also because despite appearances the woman i met down in rosebud confessed to me that she was a born-again spirit-filled christian that she had repented of her sins that she was a reformed heroin addict that she'd been clean for many years and that she served jesus and loved to tell people about jesus the dude in the suit who was really winsman charismatic was a jehovah's witness and as i got to talking to this guy i found out that actually he though he claimed to love jesus he hated jesus he didn't believe that jesus was god he didn't believe that jesus was eternal he believed that jesus had been created that he was nothing more really than an angel and that no one could find salvation in jesus christ john's going to tell us tonight how that we the test that we can use to see if a teacher is a true teacher and a true follower of jesus or a false teacher so we're going to pick it up verse one so if you go to your bibles go to page 991 at chapter four and we're just going to do one through six all right so uh let me start at verse one he said beloved remember how much he loves these people he's talking to so he's calling them beloved his little children his his loved ones he loves his church he doesn't want to see them fall away from the truth so he says 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 john knows uh that everyone who claims to be a teacher spiritual teacher is uh controlled is uh is uh influenced by one spirit or another so he knows that if a person is a genuine believer in jesus a preacher of god's word he knows that the holy spirit dwells in them and so when they speak they're seeking to speak the very words of god from scripture which are inspired by the holy spirit therefore it's the holy spirit that's at work in their lives and indeed this is true of all believers if you back up and just get the context in verse 24 it's just the verse before he says this remember from last week all who obey his commandments abide in him and he abides in them and check this out by this we know that he abides in us by the spirit that he has given us how do you know if you're a christian the holy spirit dwells in you the holy spirit abides in you so john's saying look every teacher who claims to tell you something about jesus is going to be influenced by a spirit it can either be the holy spirit or it can be some kind of evil spirit directed by satan to lead people astray that's the spiritual reality that he sees

in teachers and then he tells us the test he doesn't want us to be gullible he doesn't want us to believe everything we hear he doesn't want us to go to word bookstore or any of those christian bookstores and just walk out with whatever we pick off the shelf not all of it's good not all of it's directed by the holy spirit not all of it's biblical not every christian tv show you watch in fact most of them are not worth watching all right we need to be discerning we can't be gullible and so he gives us a couple of tests here it is verse 2 by this by this you know the spirit of god every spirit or you could say every teacher because the teacher is influenced by the spirit 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 that's his test he says if a teacher confesses jesus christ has come in the flesh and by that he means all of what i've said before about the gospel come in the flesh come into the world lived a perfect life died on the cross for our sins raised again for our salvation that's what he means by come in the flesh everyone who confesses that has the spirit of god and everyone who denies that or does not say that does not confess jesus is not from god pretty simple except it's not really that simple is it you see the problem with this test i'll tell you the problem i could have paid anyone just about if i had enough money which i don't but if i got money off you guys who have money and gave it to someone who's not a christian doesn't have this holy spirit hasn't done any degree in theology has never read the bible in fact hates the bible hates god hates jesus if i gave him enough money he would come up here and he would say jesus christ has come in the flesh and if you call upon his name you will be saved and he'd probably say can i get an amen and he'd probably say amen because he's saying things that line up with biblical truth so what does john mean when he says anyone who confesses that christ has come in the flesh is from god i think there's an answer i think we can understand what he means if we look at the word confess confess if you go back in your bible to chapter 1 verse 9 chapter 1 verse 9 he uses the same word it's the same word in the greek confess chapter 1 verse 9 he says if we confess our sins he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness get that if we confess our sins he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness so what's the nature of the confession that he's talking about is it a sort of a light parrot like kind of confession where you just say what you've heard someone else say or where you just say what you've been paid to say it's not like that is it that's not what confession is about

[16 : 52] I'll give you an example when I was a kid two brothers one older one younger the older one got along with really well the younger one there just wasn't a day that went by that he didn't punch me in the teeth or I didn't like try and break his nose that was just the way we rolled from a very early age right up until I don't know I got married no until I got saved until I got saved right and and and up until that time we just we just brawled constantly I don't know what it was but we we just fought a lot like proper proper fighting okay and so what would happen quite often is we would just get into this scrap and punch each other in the face and whatever and then eventually someone would break us up and what we had to do well rehearsed we had to shake each other's hand and say I'm sorry you can imagine how that went I'm sorry sorry sorry is that the kind of confession that John is talking about in chapter 1 verse 9 can we confess our sins in that way sorry God really cut up about that porno I watched won't do that again that's not the kind of confession that God requires needs to be heartfelt needs to be a measure of contrition like we need we really need to mean it we can't just roll up to church say a few words on the screen and be alright with God

God looks at the heart and so now listen look at this again if we understand confession to be that kind of confession read this again with me verse 2 and 3 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 so when you're looking at teachers when you're talking to teachers when you're weighing up what teachers are saying to you and this applies for Christians as well general Christians I mean you need to ask yourself is this person someone who would confess Jesus as Lord do they really believe it can I see it in their way of life are they passing those three kind of tests that John has given us do they love the truth of the gospel are they trying to live an upright life and by the way a lot of false teachers end up disqualifying themselves and losing their following because they just screw up morally right like they run away with the secretary or whatever are they living an upright life and are they loving their neighbours as themselves need to determine whether someone has a true confession of the truth okay let's keep moving second part of verse 3 we'll go from there he says and this is the spirit of the antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming and now it has already sorry now it is already in the world let me read again from the start of verse 3 every spirit that does not confess

Jesus is not from God and this is the spirit of the antichrist of which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world so John talks about this antichrist he's the only one in the bible who mentions the antichrist but there's a general kind of Jewish expectation that at the end times when the world is about to be rolled up history is about to be rolled up by Jesus when he returns and everyone's judged before that happens there is going to be this figure of opposition to God it's going to be this perhaps it's going to be a man no one really knows the details aren't given to us but there is going to be a strong opposition to Jesus the antichrist another way of saying it would be the false Christ alright someone who probably makes themselves out to be Jesus himself to lead people astray and John says these teachers who are teaching these falsehoods they have the spirit of this antichrist if you want to do a little bit more reading about the antichrist you can go to chapter 2 verse 18 he says a little bit more there why don't we read it chapter 2 verse 18 he says children it is the last hour as you have heard that antichrist is coming so now many antichrists have come from this we know that it's the last hour what he's saying is this right before Jesus comes back probably there's going to be this massive opposition to Jesus it might be sort of summed up in this one man who's the antichrist capital A false christ but in the meantime there's heaps of antichrists running around all these false christs some were in his church some maybe are in our church some might be in churches around here and they are people who lead people astray turn people away from Jesus a little bit like the guy that I was talking about in the suit and tie on my doorstep this week antichrists he says these false teachers they have the spirit of that antichrist they are like that antichrist turning people away from Jesus let's keep going verse 4 he says little children you are from

God and have conquered them for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world he is giving them this encouragement and he is giving us this encouragement that though there is a time coming where an antichrist might rise up against Jesus though there is a time that is happening right now where there are false teachers all over the place leading people astray turning people away from Jesus he says to his church to the Christians in his church and he says to us today if you are a believer you have conquered those false Christs you have conquered those false teachers because the spirit the Holy Spirit that's at work in you that lives within you has overcome those false teachers the Holy Spirit of God is more powerful than those false teachers the Holy

Spirit of God is more powerful than those spirits who would lead people astray the Holy Spirit of God is more powerful than Satan himself though we might be weak sheep who are easily led astray the Holy Spirit is more powerful and has overcome those false spirits so be encouraged he says be encouraged the Holy Spirit will not be conquered the gospel of Jesus will never disappear church attendance might go up and down missionary coverage around the world might fluctuate but the gospel of Jesus will never disappear and the church of God will never fail Jesus said himself that he was going to build his church on a rock and the gates of hell would not prevail against it it's worth looking just for a little bit at why it is that we have not been overcome by the false teachers might be easy for us to think as we see other people being led astray and other churches doing a bad job and other churches forgetting their

[24 : 45] Bible and other Christians stuffing up and it might be easy for us to get proud and say well at least I know the truth and read my Bible and pray just about every day come to a church where they preach the Bible so you're welcome God doing a good job it would be easy for us to think that way and many Christians are proud and puffed up and it's so so sad because John says the reason that we have not been overcome by these things is because the spirit that's within us has overcome them not us it's not just that we're more smart more intelligent more better educated it's the Holy Spirit that dwells within us that has overcome these things let's finish this off verse 5 and 6 he says this they those false teachers those false believers they're from the world therefore what they say is from the world and the world listens to them we are from

God whoever knows God listens to us and whoever is not from God does not listen to us from this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error does it ever kind of annoy you or puzzle you that we've got a hundred people here and when Oprah puts on a bit of a show she gets a hundred thousand why is that like I reckon I can come up with some better stuff than she does I've watched Oprah every now and then and it just seems to be the same thing over and over again with slightly different emphases and slightly different angles it's like a horoscope just watch Oprah and you just hear a horoscope right and I wonder you know why does she get a hundred thousand I want a hundred thousand no why is that why are our churches kind of moderately sized and people who don't claim to know Jesus and don't teach truth from his word can attract massive crowds

John explains it here those people they're from the world and so the world listens to them we we're not from the world we're born of God so while the people born of God might listen to us people from the world do not and here's the truth it's not again it's not that people who aren't Christians are somehow less intelligent most of the intelligent people I know aren't believers alright it's not that we have some sort of secret that they don't have that we discovered by means of you know a better and more pure spiritual awareness or something none of that's true the only reason if you're here and you're a Christian the only reason you're a Christian is because the Holy Spirit did something in your life if it was up to you if it was up to me we wouldn't be

Christians we would never choose God that's the big idea of the Bible people don't choose God they reject God every single one of us every single human being that has ever lived aside from the one man Jesus Christ has rejected God from Adam and Eve to right now including my seven week old baby she looks cute she looks adorable she's the best looking baby that's ever been born and she's sweet and she sleeps well and she feeds well and she's awesome but if it was up to her she would reject Jesus there's nothing innocent about her she's sinful just like every one of us and every one of us if it was up to us would follow our sinful desires right into hell itself so don't get up on your high horse if you're a Christian and think I must have done something good God has rewarded me for being more spiritually aware or whatever it's only by the

Holy Spirit's work in your life that you can confess Jesus as Lord that's his teaching here it's his teaching in his gospel the gospel of John if you read chapter 16 it's all about this truth you can only come to God if the Holy Spirit works in your life so listen it is true that the world listens to the world and those who are born of God listen to those who teach about God that is true but if you're here tonight and you're not a Christian you don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God you don't believe that he died on a cross for your sins you're not going to live each day trying to follow him and please him and you're not hoping every day for that day him forever if that's you and

[30 : 12] I've been that person I don't want you to hear this verse and say well I'm of the world and he says I'm not going to listen to this Bible teacher I'm not going to listen to this teaching of the Bible so what's the point I don't want you to think that way because here's the truth God has promised in his word that anyone like that heroin addict that I met or like that Jehovah's witness that I met or like me even me that anyone who calls on the name of Jesus that means anyone who confesses something from the heart if you say from your heart and believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sin and that he was raised again from the dead to prove to you that

God could do the same for you when you die if you believe that God promises that he will never ever reject you he will never say no you are on the world team you are not on my team you can't switch teams he will never say that he will never say you you can't follow me he will never say that if you're here tonight and you're not a Christian what should you do if you hear what I've been saying and you say well I want to follow Jesus I don't want to be left out I want that forgiveness I want that joy I want that eternal life if that's you and you've heard tonight that the only way that you can become a Christian is if the Holy Spirit works in you it says later in this passage we won't go there but it says this is why we love

God not that we loved him but that he loved us first he loved us first that's how we can love him so if that's you tonight this is all you need to do all you need to do is just call out to God from your heart with confession something from your heart and say God I don't want you to leave me Jesus I want that forgiveness Jesus I want that eternal life God I don't want to be led astray by the false teaching of this world you say that to God he promises he will never ever forsake you he will never ever leave you he will never ever exclude you and there are plenty of Christians in this church tonight who have done that very thing and have found God to be reliable and true to his word so like

I said before after the service we're going to pray and ask God to save you from your sin that's the place to do it if you want to talk to someone this is all new to you you don't know about this maybe this isn't true maybe this isn't right for you that's okay too we'd love to just talk to you we'd love to chat with you after the service we're going to have some supper together we'd like to just chat with you about what it means to follow Jesus let me just remind you about those three things that we need to remember each day as encouragement that we are following Jesus we need to love the truth of the gospel Jesus is Lord Jesus is King Jesus is enough we need to love holiness not that we're perfect that each day we're trying to live more like Jesus who need to love one another we need to look around tonight and see people that you love and are seeking to love better each day so with that in mind we pray for us and we'll be done

Father I thank you so much for this practical teaching from your word that helps us to distinguish between people who claim to know the truth and people who do know the truth people who claim to love Jesus and people who genuinely love him as their saviour and their Lord Lord please give each one of us whether we're a teacher or not give us that conviction in our confession of Jesus as Lord I pray just a special prayer now Lord you've just put on my heart people here tonight who don't claim to know you don't claim to follow you Lord we just love them so much we thank you so much for bringing them here tonight and we pray that your

[35 : 40] Holy Spirit would be at work within them we know that no amount of words we say or songs we sing or prayers we pray can change anyone's heart but your Holy Spirit can change them so Lord we pray that you do that for their good and for your glory we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen