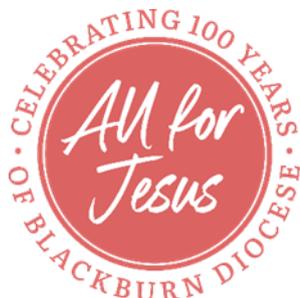


+WEEKLY SERMON

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Being tested can be a good thing

I had my annual morning of suspense earlier this month. My old Volvo was having its MOT.

It's a good thing that cars get tested. It's important that the brakes work properly and the tyres have the right amount of tread.

Sometimes a football manager gives a young player a trial. They play in a training match behind closed doors – to see if they're going to be able to perform when it really matters.

Similarly, we sometimes talk about a testing period of our lives, where the props that we normally rely on are taken away. There's an unexpected diagnosis or a bereavement or an issue at work.

Where do tests like this come from? Does God ever test people? The answer is 'Yes'.

As the people of God stand on the brink of the promised land, Moses reminds them of the past 40 years:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (Deuteronomy 8:2)

God didn't just take them out of Egypt and immediately transplant them into the promised land. There were 40 hard years of wandering – where they were tested. And those tests revealed what was in their hearts.

It's what he did with Israel in the desert. And it's what he did with Jesus.

The gospel writer Matthew tells us that '*Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted - or tested - by the devil*' (Matthew 4:1)

And we're meant to see the parallels between what happened to God's son, Israel – and what happened to Jesus, the one whom God has just announced as '*My son, whom I love*'.

The people of Israel were in the wilderness for 40 years; Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days.

Jesus is being tested. God is showing us what is in his heart and what kind of king he will prove to be.

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But there's one big difference between Israel in the wilderness and Jesus in the wilderness: where Israel failed (and where we continue to fail), Jesus was obedient. Not just for 40 days, but even to death on the cross.

As we begin this season of Lent, it's good to thank God for Jesus, for his perfect obedience to the word of his Father and for his victory over all the powers of evil. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Andrew Raynes, Vicar of Christ Church, Blackburn