

March 11, 2007  
Lent 3

*"A History Lesson on Faithfulness You Will Want to Remember"*

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### **1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13**

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**F**or I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. <sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." <sup>8</sup> We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-- and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. <sup>9</sup> We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-- and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them did-- and were killed by the destroying angel. <sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! <sup>13</sup> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Picture a group of kids playing soccer on the dirt streets of a village in Afghanistan. One of the boys kicks the ball extra hard. It soars in the air and lands in a nearby field. He runs to get the ball, ignoring the many warnings from his parents. There is an explosion, a flash of fire, a burning sensation in his right leg. He looks down and half of his leg is gone from a land mine buried in the ground during the war with the Russians. Over 15,000 people die each year from stepping on land mines left over from previous wars. Millions of unexploded mines wait to maim or kill anyone who steps on them.

In the words we just read to you we have a warning telling us to watch out for something far more dangerous than a landmine. We are warned against setting our hearts on evil things that could ultimately lead to eternal death and destruction. Paul points to examples from the history of God's people as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses. An entire generation of people died in the wilderness, never saw the Promised Land, and lost their eternal rest with God because they opened themselves up to sin and become unfaithful to God.

It has been said that those who ignore history that they are destined to repeat it. Look at the history of the people in the Bible. Look at the history of people you know who once walked with the Lord but now despise being in his Word. Or look at the history of your past life and your moments of unfaithfulness. It is scary to look at what sin can do to us if left unchecked. Our only hope of making it through this life to the place Jesus has prepared for us is the faithfulness of our God who has promised to protect and keep us.

## **We look at our human history of unfaithfulness**

“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.”

God’s people who left the land of Egypt for the Promised Land were so blessed. They were under a cloud by day that led them and protected them from the hot sun. They had it made in the shade. At night there was a pillar of fire that provided light, guided them through the desert and assured them of God’s presence. They received water from a rock. They were given manna to eat in the morning, and quail in the evening. And they knew about Christ, the promised Messiah who was to come, the Rock of their salvation.

I am holding a rock in my hand with a cross on it. Wouldn’t it be comforting if this rock had a special glow to it, a visible sign of God’s presence and glory that I can take out of my pocket every day and assure myself that the Lord is present with me everyday? We don’t need this special visible presence of God because we have something better. We see with our eyes of faith the glory of Jesus suffering and dying on the cross to make full payment for every sin we have ever committed. We have seen the nail marks in his hands that he showed to the disciples on the night of his resurrection. We know that Jesus is at the right hand of God micromanaging our lives. It is all so real to us. We are so blessed, even more blessed than the people who had the Lord with them in their travels from Egypt to the Promised Land. And we have been baptized into Christ. And we are privileged see God’s glory in the Holy Sacrament where we receive the body and blood of the Lord. The history of your life and mine is just one blessing after another.

What was the response to all of the blessings the Lord provided? We are told, “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them. Their bodies were scattered in the desert.” These people died in the desert. They did not get into the Promised Land because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord. The book of Hebrews says they did not get into the Lord’s rest, meaning they lost their hold on eternal life. There is a reason why the Bible reveals to us the results of their unfaithfulness. “Now these things occurred to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” We need to learn from history what caused these people to lose everything they had from the Lord.

Paul opens our eyes to see some of the problems. He tells us, “Do not be idolaters as some of them were: as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.” Moses went up to the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights to receive the law from the Lord. This was a time of testing for the people. They came to Aaron and asked to make an idol for them similar to what they had seen in Egypt to help them worship the Lord. The people brought their gold. Aaron had it melted down and he supervised the construction of a golden calf. When it was completed, Aaron told them they were going to use this golden calf to help worship the Lord. They brought their sacrifices to the Lord in front of the golden calf. They ate and they drank and they danced around in pagan dances, all in the name of the Lord. This was not an attempt to throw out the Lord, but it was an attempt to worship the Lord on their terms, an attempt to beef up their religion with a holy cow.

I don't think that there is anyone here this morning who has a holy cow as an idol in their home that they are using to worship the Lord. But we do fall into the same hole of sin whenever we want to have God on our terms. We want him shaped by how we want him to be, rather than how he has revealed us to himself in his Word, especially when it comes to justifying sinful things in our lives and not repenting of them. I think of one of hymns with these words: "Cast down every idol throne. Reign supreme and reign alone."

Here is another important lesson from these people that we can apply to ourselves today. "We should not commit sexual immorality as some of them did- and in one day 23,000 of them died." There was once a king of the Moabites named Balak who hired a man named Baalim to curse God's people as they wandered in the desert. That didn't work because every time he opened his mouth to curse God's people, blessings came out of his mouth instead. Then Baalim offered a plan that worked. He told Balak to have the wildest and most sensual young women of Moab invite the men of Israel to engage in the sexual immorality that was involved with sacrificing to their gods. The plan worked. The invitations to sensual celebrations of the wild Moabite girls were not turned down. A plague struck the people and 23,000 of them died.

There is not a man like Baalim who is secretly talking to the moguls in Hollywood to turn out films that show a man and woman kissing and a minute later they are in bed together. Satan is behind the film industry and the porn industry. Today we have cables that bring images into our homes and little disks called DVD's that play films. Soon we will be downloading movies from the Internet. The previous generation in our land would not have tolerated such hugs and kisses that were not the way God wants them to be. Like the frog in the water that accepts warmer and warmer temperatures until he is boiled to death, it is so easy to become tolerant of immorality.

Then there was the historical example of grumbling and complaining. "We should not test the Lord as some of them did-and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble as some of them did- and were killed by the destroying angel." The people grumbled complained when they had to around the land of Edom. They spoke out against Moses and the Lord saying, "Why have you brought us up of out Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" At one time they even longed for the leeks and onions and melons in the land of Egypt. Have you ever wished you could turn the clock back to better times in the past? Have you ever compared the present to what was in the past and said, "Lord, why are you letting me go through all this?" as if somehow God does not have a plan for your life? Such words and thoughts test the Lord and challenge his wisdom that says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

All these things in the history of God's people serve as warnings for us. Don't say this could never happen to me. Listen to what Paul tells us this morning: "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall." Sin is worse than playing with a land mine. It is even more dangerous when we have a frame of mind says, "That could never to me. I am an exception to the rule."

History shows a long list of people who suffered horrible consequences when they used their freedom in Christ as a license to sin. History also shows that God is always faithful. He does not take ghoulish delight in seeing you blow yourself up by some sin. Instead,

God is faithful in his promises to protect and keep us.

### **We look at God's history of faithfulness**

God is faithful. He tells us, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." Jesus himself experienced temptations that are common to us. He showed us how to defend ourselves by using the Scriptures. We speak the truth of God's Word and use the shield of faith and sword of the Spirit to protect ourselves against the flaming arrows of Satan. The Lord knows the trouble you have seen in your life. Hebrews tells us, "For we do not have a high priest is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin."

From history, the past history of your life and mine, and the past history of the people in the Bible we see how God is always faithful, always there for his people, always concerned about having them come home to him. "And God is faithful: he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you stand up under it."

The Lord your God knew what it would take to satisfy the punishment necessary to pay for all the times we have been unfaithful in the past. He knew exactly how much suffering Jesus had to endure to make us free. He also knows exactly what is needed to help us through temptation and get through the mine fields of sin until some day we are home with him and safe forever. God is faithful. That is a lesson from history we want to take home with us today. Amen.