2-25-24

1 Corinthians 10:1-14

As Paul tells us in verse 11, we are the people upon whom the end of the ages has come. We are living in the last days; the New Testament era is the time during which God is wrapping up history. The Kingdom of God has arrived as Jesus made clear in Matthew 12:28 when He told the Pharisees that “*the Kingdom of God has come upon you.*” The Kingdom arrived with the manifestation of Jesus the Christ.

In Daniel chapter 2, we read of a dream that Daniel interpreted. Part of the dream was a rock cut without human hands which struck the kingdoms of the earth and then the rock grew and spread until it filled the whole earth. Jesus is the fulfillment of that interpretation. He was born of the virgin so that no man was involved. He began the church which has been steadily spreading throughout the whole earth. And one day, He will return to complete the work of subduing all earthly kingdoms to Himself.

In His wisdom, God has chosen to not reveal the exact time of Christ’s return, but we have been given things to look for: an increase in lawlessness, a lack of morality, people becoming absorbed in themselves, demanding autonomy from God, and apostacy in the church. Although pretty much the same things have been happening throughout history, certainly the intensity has increased dramatically and is accelerating. Perhaps Jesus’ return will still not be during our lifetimes, but it is clear that we had better be about our Master’s business.

As with the Israelites perishing in the wilderness, going through the motions of Christianity do not save us. Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and participation in spiritual gifts are extremely important in the Christian experience, but they do not bring about salvation. Only a steadfast acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour will do that. The people of Israel were God’s chosen people; called to be His own possession; but many of them have fallen away due to their refusal to accept God on His terms and in faith. In the same way God the Holy Spirit calls many to come to Christ for salvation; but only those called who respond in faithful acceptance will be saved.

Paul has pointed out several of the mistakes Israel made after their miraculous delivery from Egypt: idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the LORD, and grumbling. As we have considered, some in the church at Corinth were heading in the same direction; and so do many Christians today. As Paul tells us, these things happened to them and, very importantly, they were written down for an example for us and to instruct us. We have already discussed the four examples Paul brings up, but there are many more.

That is something important for us to keep in mind as we read the Bible, especially the Old Testament; these things were written for our benefit. The accounts are true, but these particular ones are included for us to learn from other’s mistakes. We learn what is not pleasing to God and also, that ultimately, He will not tolerate these things. They are not simply interesting stories for us to read and tell children; they have important messages.

Consider the story of Achen, who was an average warrior for Israel; and Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron who were priests. All three of them were destroyed due to disobedience to the LORD. In the New Testament there is the story of Annanias and Saphira, who were struck dead for lying about a donation they made to the church. By these accounts, we learn that God does not allow us to play fast and loose with what He says. He is God; with a capital “G”. He is Yahweh, the God of the Bible, and He rules heaven and earth. How blessed we are as Christians that He is our Father, but we must treat Him with the reverence He deserves.

Consider the cities of the valley with Sodom and Gomorrah; destroyed with fire from heaven due to the practice of homosexuality. God did not hate the people; but because of their abhorrent behaviour that was in rebellion against His natural order established in the Garden of Eden, He brought about their destruction. God lets us know that He does not accept sexual immorality of any kind.

One more example I will give is Manasseh, one of the kings of Judah before Babylon destroyed them. Manasseh sinned greatly against the LORD, but one different thing brought out about him that was not mentioned about other kings was that he spilled much innocent blood. The innocent blood he spilled was what pushed Judah past the point of return. Manasseh himself repented and turned to the LORD; a king who followed him, Josiah, was very good and whole heartedly followed the LORD. Regardless, due to the innocent blood shed by Manasseh, Judah was taken over by Babylon. I can’t help but think of the innocent blood spilled in this country through abortion. God does not take kindly to the sacrificing of children.

These are just a few more examples that are relevant to our day and age. Now days, we see that God does not immediately smite those who are idolatrous, sexually immoral, disobedient, or shed blood; and that has led some to think that God has changed His mind about some of these things. But the Bible assures us that God is unchanging. He cannot change or He would be a different God. So those things that we read about in the Bible that were offensive to Him in the past, are still offensive to Him today.

God’s word explains to us that in His great mercy, God allows us much time to repent and turn to Jesus for salvation. But it is also clear that those who fail to heed the warnings and remain unrepentant will face the consequences demonstrated in these accounts of the past. Time is short; it is only God’s mercy on those souls who have not yet turned to Him that causes Him to tarry. But one day it will be the end and Christ will return; there will be no more time. As we are told in Hebrews 4, “*Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts.*” Don’t make the mistakes the Israelites made or some of the Corinthians made; if we are truly committed to Christ we will do our best to recognize these mistakes and avoid them.

There is something common to all these mistakes and that is temptation. We are tempted to do evil. Temptation has three sources: satan (which includes all the fallen angels that tempt us), the world (which calls us to rebellion against all that God stands for), and our own flesh or selves. The Bible lets us know that our own hearts are desperately evil, and that is due to the sin nature that indwells us. Because of these things, we must constantly be on guard against temptation.

One very important note about temptation is that it does not come from God. James 1:13 says, “*Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.*” So we can be assured that God will never tempt us, but He may on occasion test us. There is a difference. When God tests us, the aim is to bring Himself glory through our success, to strengthen us in perseverance, and to make us more like our Saviour, Jesus. On the other hand, satan will tempt us with the goal of making us fail; he wants us to sin against God.

In dealing with temptation, Paul starts with a very applicable warning in verse 12, “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*” I think it’s noteworthy that the word “fall” in this verse is the same Greek word used for “fell” in verse 8; that is the 23,000 who were slain by God’s plague because of sexual immorality. This is not a simple stumble; this is a fall from one’s standing in the Christian life or, in the case of one who is not truly Christian, a complete fall from grace.

The problem that is behind the one who thinks he stands is pride. Now, we can have a little pride in our accomplishments or a job well done, as long as it is tempered by knowing that God is the One who gave us our skill and success. Pride quickly becomes a problem when it stands against humility. Pride is a problem because it often raises itself up against God: often we don’t even realize it. The Bible warns us about pride in several places. For example: Proverbs 16:18, “*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.*” Destruction is the type of fall Paul is talking about in verse 12. Also, Proverb 8:13, “*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate*.”

In the case of verse 12, pride causes one to think that they can’t fall; they believe that they are too strong in their Christian faith to slip into gross immorality. This often applies to those who are in leadership positions in the church; but anyone is susceptible. How often do we hear of pastors who had a good ministry and suddenly they are caught in an adulterous affair, or embezzling from the church, or they become abusive in their leadership position.

Certainly some of these are wolves in sheep’s clothing who wanted their position just to have access to these things. But often it is someone who started off well, who sincerely wanted to serve Christ, but then allowed themselves to think they were above falling and became prideful. Once this happens, it is only a matter of time before the fall. The media loves to get ahold of these stories and perhaps church leadership is more likely to succumb to this kind of sin; but no Christian is immune and these things happen all the time. If you ever get to thinking that you are beyond the reach of sin, just remember Jeremiah 17:9, “*The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?*”

Going along with this is verse 13 where Paul makes some statements about temptation. The first thing is that there are no new temptations. They may have different trappings, but they are the same temptations that have been around since mankind was expelled from the Garden of Eden. You will never face a temptation that hasn’t already been faced by countless thousands before. However, just because they have all been around doesn’t mean that they are easy to resist. Satan, the world, and our flesh are all powerful enemies and we need help to deal with them. When we think we don’t need help is when we fall.

We have a very important promise here: God will never allow us to face a temptation that we cannot bear; one that is too strong for us. Furthermore, He will always provide a means of escape. This is supernatural help from God; how amazing, how wonderful He is. At the same time we see the words “escape” and “endure”. We have our own work to do here. When we faithfully resist in the strength of Christ, we will be successful. When God sent the fiery serpents, He made a way for the people to be saved from them; He didn’t take the snakes away. God will make a way for us to resist temptation, but He will not take temptations away.

One of our biggest problems regarding sin and/or temptation is that we play with it. We allow ourselves to think about it. We tell ourselves that there is no harm in thinking about something as long as we don’t do it. But sin starts in the mind. It grows in the heart. Take adultery for example; in Matthew 5:28 Jesus said, “*but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*.” So just allowing ourselves to think about a sin is a sin itself. When we are in sin like this, God will remove His protection. It will then just be a matter of time before physical adultery takes place and all the consequences that come with it. It is the same for greed, anger, selfishness, or any other sin. The Puritans had the concept of the “mortification of sin”. When a temptation comes or a sinful thought; mortify it; kill it; don’t play with it.

We are often tempted where the Lord gives us the ability to resist or endure: some money is lying within easy reach, but we leave it there; we could lie to stay out of trouble, but we tell the truth instead, there is someone at the office who is attractive to us, but we refuse to allow ourselves to dwell on them. There are daily things that we can simply resist as long as we are true to our Master, Jesus.

But there can be a different category, a temptation that is somehow after us. That’s where the Lord will provide a means of escape. I think of Joseph while he was in Egypt. He was the slave of a man named Potipher. Joseph did a good job for his master but there was a problem: Potipher’s wife was attracted to Joseph and wanted to have an affair with him. Joseph turned her down time and again until finally she grabbed him by his coat.

Certainly, Joseph was tempted. He could have easily gotten by with it, but he refused to sin against God. When it came to the point where she took ahold of him; he ran away. Yes, he ended up in trouble anyway, but not because he sinned. And because Joseph was faithful, God worked it out to his great advantage. If you have to run away from sin, do so. Don’t let pride make you stand there and take a fall. Running from the temptation may mean disposing of your computer; it may mean leaving your job; it may mean leaving a certain group of friends. Regardless of the immediate consequences, running from temptation will have the best results with God in the long run.

Paul actually tells them to “*flee from idolatry*”. A problem with these sins is that they will lead to some form of idolatry. And because these sins are a way of gratifying ourselves in spite of God’s desire, ultimately, we become our own idol.

Don’t play with sin or temptation. That is the first step to losing the battle. Depend on the Lord for strength, but never let down your guard and become lazy. And when you do fail, turn to the Lord in confession and repentance; He will lovingly take you in His arms and set you back on the path.

Prayer

Thank You Lord, for all the examples You have given us in Your word. May Your Holy Spirit show us in each of them what we need to learn and help us to avoid these same mistakes.

We ask Your strength in the face of temptation. Thank You for the promises of a way of escape and that we will never be tempted beyond what we can endure.

And thank You for forgiveness in Jesus Christ. We fail, far too often; yet You are patient and kind and merciful to Your children. May we never take that for granted.

We ask these things in the blessed name of Jesus

Amen