

The danger of idolatry

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[0 : 00] So let's take some time to quiet ourselves as we listen to God's word. Now in the children's story, The Prince and the Pauper, a poor boy named Tom Canty dreams every day of becoming a prince.

Loitering around the palace gates one day, Tom meets Edward Tudor, the Prince of Wales. Overwhelmed with excitement, Tom runs to Edward, but a guard catches him and almost beats him before Edward stops him.

Edward welcomes Tom into the palace and the boys are fascinated at how much they look alike. So they decided to switch their clothes and swap places in society temporarily.

Edward would go play around in the banks, fishing and running around with the kids, while Tom would get to enjoy all the privileges of being a prince.

Fortunately, that plan did last long. As soon as Edward leaves his room, a guard on patrol catches him and kicks him out of the palace. Edward spends the rest of the story getting a first-hand perspective on the brutality of poverty and the injustice of social inequality across England, as those with power abused the poor and abused the neglected.

[1 : 42] So Edward, even though he was born with all the privileges of this world, lost him as soon as he switched clothes. Now this morning we'll be looking at a group of people who had all the privileges but chose to abandon their blessings.

Previously, in our series on Corinthians, we saw that the Corinthians were coming to Paul and saying, What's wrong with going to temples? What's wrong with eating food sacrificed to idols? And Paul says, Really, there's nothing wrong with it. But in chapter 8, he lists love as the virtue. He says to the Corinthians, Hey, even though you have the right to eat such food, keep in mind that there might be a new Christian brother or sister among you who might stumble when they see someone eat such food.

So because of that, let's love our brothers and sisters and not do anything that can hurt their faith. Now last week, we saw that Paul, in preaching to a Corinthian culture that worships honor, purposely chooses not to be paid.

And Paul ends with a note of encouragement. He tells us to exercise self-control as we adapt our lifestyle and proclaim the gospel so that we can win the prize that's waiting for us at the end of the race.

[3 : 11] We'll turn with me now to 1 Corinthians 10. 1 Corinthians 10. In today's passage, we'll be asking the question, What happens to those who fail to exercise self-control as they run the race?

What happens to someone who starts off well but falls off in the middle? Israel is the perfect example of people who had all the privileges and all the tools that were set up to do well, but they failed.

They gave in to idolatry. They gave in to the sinful impulses of their heart. Israel deeds serve as a warning, but also a prelude to a message of encouragement that awaits us at the end of this passage.

Our text today can be divided into three movements. Privileges alone don't save you. Sin will destroy you.

Only God can deliver you. Let's dive in. Privileges alone don't save you. Paul starts off with strong emphasis.

[4 : 35] In other words, pay extra attention to what I'm about to say.

Brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. What an intriguing and perhaps confusing statement.

What does Paul mean by this? Let's break it down. Let's start with what's clear and undebatable. When we look at the words cloud and pass through the sea, anybody who reads that has in mind Exodus 14, where Yahweh led his people with a pillar of clouds as they crossed the Red Sea. What's more debatable is how Paul interprets this event. Paul seems to tie Israel's crossing of the Red Sea with baptism.

Now to be sure, he does call Israel the ancestors of the Corinthians. In the sense that Paul is also calling New Testament believers a continuation of Israel.

[5 : 58] So in other words, there is a consistency and parallel between how God relates to Israel in the past and how God connects to people in the present.

And one of those parallels is baptism. Now just as Christians deliver, just as Christians proclaim our deliverance from sin and our turn towards Yahweh, towards God through baptism and through public witness.

So did Israel proclaim their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and their trust in Yahweh when they passed through the sea under the witnessing eyes of every nation.

This is what Paul means when he says at the end of verse 2, they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Just as Moses was Israel's deliverer, so is Christ the Savior of all Christians.

Just as Israel passed down the sea, across the sea, so are Christians baptized by water. So both experiences, whether it's the crossing of the Red Sea or baptism, constitute the beginning of Israel's existence and the church's existence.

[7 : 26] And what I mean by that is Israel's existence started with crossing the Red Sea. And the Christian's existence starts right at the beginning with baptism.

At least it should, logically. And both experiences also have something to do with water. Now the comparisons don't end here. What's really fascinating is verse 3 and 4.

It says, They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink.

So on top of baptism, Paul seems to suggest there is a second parallel between Israel's eating in the wilderness and Christians partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Well, let's slow down a little bit. We recall in Exodus 16 that God provided bread for His people in the wilderness.

[8 : 32] Yahweh sustained His people as they wander in the desert. And in a chapter later, God tells Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with his staff.

Moses did as he was told. And the people would quench. They quenched their thirst from that rock. So Paul calls these food and drinks spiritual in two senses.

The first is because, of course, God supernaturally provided these food as an act of divine substance. But in a second sense, Israel's coming together every morning to eat and drink manna parallels Christians' fellowship as we partake the Lord's Supper.

Now at this point, Paul recognizes that some people might think, Uh, Paul, you're going a little bit too far. Now at this point, Paul suspects some people will say, Wait a minute.

Those comparisons are quite a stretch, don't you think? Paul says, Not quite. Not quite. For the glue that holds both Israel's experience in the desert and the Corinthians' experience together is no one other than Jesus Christ Himself.

[9 : 54] The second half of verse 4 reads, For they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Now certainly in the Song of Moses, Paul cites, Sorry, sorry.

Suddenly in the Song of Moses, Moses calls the God of Israel a rock. We read in Deuteronomy 32, chapter 32, verse 4.

He is the rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.

Now verse 15 is particularly important for our purposes. It says, Jeshurun grew fat and wicked. Filled with food, they became heavy and sleek.

They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the rock, their Savior. According to Moses, Jeshurun, which is another name for Israel, abandoned their Creator.

[11 : 04] They sold their hearts to pagan idols. They forgot the giver of the gift. And Paul doubles down by saying, the rock that Israel rejected was Jesus Himself.

For Jesus is the link between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus is the connection between the Israelites and the Gentiles. We know that all of the Old Testament points forward at the coming of the Messiah.

And we know that the New Testament looks back at what Christ accomplished through His incarnation, death, and resurrection. So in the middle, what's happening between both the Old and the New Testament is the person of Christ Himself.

So as Israel rebelled against Christ, the Corinthians are on the verge of doing the same thing. Paul sees his friends treading down the same path that Israel used to do. The Corinthians are going to repeat the same mistakes.

[12:26] See, Paul's point is that, look at Israel, they enjoy all the privileges of this world. Yahweh chose them to be their own people. He delivered them from Egypt. He fed them in the desert.

On top of that, by crossing the Red Sea, Israel got a foretaste and enjoyed a kind of baptism. By eating food in the desert, Israel also got a kind of Lord's Supper.

They had everything, all the tools to be set up well. And despite all these privileges, they rebelled and sinned against God. And the result is what we see in verse 5.

Their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. They were banned. Most of them were banned from entering the promised land.

See, privileges can save you. Privileges can't save you. Privileges can start you off well. But they alone are insufficient.

[13:37] They can't save you. And what's worse is number two, sin will destroy you. This next section, we're going to be asking the question, what exactly did Israel do wrong?

More specifically, why did Paul pick some of their sins to talk about? So how does Israel's sins that is talked about in the next few verses parallel the Corinthians and the rejection of Christ?

What is the connection? What's the similarity? Well, according to Paul, there are four ways in which they are similar. But before we dive into that, we need to first pay attention to the transitional verse in verse 6.

Now these things occur as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

There's two keywords here, occurred as examples, and setting our hearts on evil things.

Well, firstly, Israel is an example in the sense that they genuinely prefigure the church. For they enjoy the same privileges, the privileges that would be launched in full for the church, Israel also got a taste of it.

[14:53] They got a taste of baptism. They got a taste of Lord's Supper. So how God connects with Israel in the past is how He's going to relate to His people under the new covenant.

It's how He's going to connect to Christians. But the difference is the second part, setting our hearts on evil things, because Israel for sure did that.

They lusted, and they sold their hearts out, and they received judgment. The Corinthians don't have to do the same.

The Corinthians can look at these as a warning so that they don't fall down the same trap of repeating the same mistakes. Well, the first of the four ways Israel parallels the Corinthian church is idolatry.

Verse 7, 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 revelry. Now, in this sentence, we see that, actually, Paul's problem is not so much with the Corinthians going to the temple to eat food sacrificed to idols.

[16:09] Rather, his concern is what happens afterwards. You see, the Corinthians were pretty much coming to Paul and saying, Hey, there is no way we can get around this.

The food that we have is, no matter where we go, it's bound to be sacrificed to idols anyways. So stop being a busybody. Stop banning us.

Just let us go to the temples already. But Paul knows their true intentions. Paul knows what's going on in their mind. He references Exodus, chapter 32.

Chapter 32, verse 6. It says here, the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

You know, what's interesting is that the same verse, the first half, it talks about people rose early, sacrificed and offerings and presented fellowship offerings. But Paul didn't reference that.

[17:19] See, he didn't cite that here because it seems it seems that the problem isn't so much the offering part but the problem is the activity that happens afterwards.

They sat down and eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry, revelry, which literally means got up to play. Got up to play carries overtones of sexual activity.

Paul knew that the Corinthians were flaunting their freedom saying it's fine for us to go to the temples because really their true motivation is to participate and join in on the fun that happens after heavy eating and heavy drinking.

the second way Israel parallels the Corinthians is actually tied closely to the first.

Verse 8 We should not commit sexual immorality as some of them did and one day 23,000 of them died. Now whether you are Israel or you're Paul or you are the Corinthians whoever reads this passage will know what Paul is talking about and that is the event in Numbers 25.

[18 : 40] So back then the Moabites women seduced Israelite men to sleep with them and worship make sacrifices to the god Baal. The thing about pagan gods is they're often gods of fertility which means that more often than not sexual activity followed worshipping them.

verses 2-3 is particularly important. Numbers 25 verse 2-3 The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods so Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and the Lord's anger burned against them.

even in the original context eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual activity went hand in hand there's no way around it.

but in Yahweh's eyes the joining of an Israelite's body to a temple prostitute meant they have yoked themselves put themselves under the slavery and control and ownership of Baal and the Lord's anger burned against them.

See the Corinthians they are on the verge of doing the same thing. They are on the verge of pressing the wrong buttons and they are on the verge of jeopardizing themselves.

[20 : 28] Now I remember back in college my my close friend Noah whenever he was home for for break he would drive his then girlfriend Taylor back to her parents home.

Now I wasn't there were a couple times where Taylor's parents weren't home yet and Taylor didn't want to be in the whole house alone. So guess what they did?

No they actually didn't enter the house. They sat in the car and waited for however long it took Taylor's parents to get back. Sometimes it meant sitting in the middle of heavy snow and only relying on the car heater to warm them.

could they have just walked into the house instead? Sure there's nothing wrong with that. But both of them knew that having the whole house to themselves would have opened up a host of temptations.

Now every couple is different and what Noah and Taylor did is by no means a golden rule. honorable but what is honorable is that they knew what their boundaries were.

[21 : 45] They knew their limits and they didn't push them. But the Carimthians they also knew what was right and what was wrong. Except in their case they're finding ways to go around it.

They're finding ways to see what can I get away with. Which buttons can I push so that I don't get caught and I can still technically be doing the right thing.

That was their mindset. Now thirdly Paul says in verse 9 we should not test Christ as some of them did and were killed by snakes.

Now the Old Testament reference for this is Numbers 21. In Numbers 21 the people of Israel went up against Moses and said hey why did you lead us out of Egypt?

We were eating good food. I'm going to read it for you actually just to listen to how outrageous their statement was. This is Numbers 21.

[22 : 57] And the people spoke against God and against Moses and said why have you brought us up of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread there is no water and we detest this miserable food.

By challenging manna little did the people know by challenging manna they're challenging the provider God himself. In the same way today when the people challenge Paul's authority Paul's prohibition of temple activities they're challenging Christ himself.

Paul's saying look you must be insane if you think you can dine at the table of the pagos eat cultic meals food sacrifice to idols and at the same time show up at the table of the Lord and eat the Lord's supper.

Do you recognize how crazy that is? Finally we come to one of the most difficult verses whereas verse 9 is about people testing Christ verse 10 is about grumbling it says in verse 10 and do not

grumble as some of them did and were killed by the destroying angel.

Now there are two possible references it could be numbers 14 when the people grumble against Moses and his leadership or it could be they grumble against which is number 16 when they grumble against Moses about how God unfairly judged Korah and his followers the problem with both of these is that in neither of these references do we have a destroying angel and when that's the case it's time for us to think take a step back maybe it's not meant to be taken literally if we just take the phrase destroying angel for a sign and we think about okay what is the time when there was complaint grumbling and then there is judgment then numbers 14 stands out as the better reference compared to number 16 because there the people complain complain about

[25 : 31] Moses complain about being driven out of Egypt and you know what God did God banned most of them from entering the promised land so now that we have that we can look at the phrase the destroying angel again and we see in Exodus chapter 12 verse 23 the destroyer says here when the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians he will see the blood on the top and sides of the door frame and will pass over that doorway and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down so originally the destroyer was the people was the one who punished Egypt by killing the firstborn son so in this context the destroyer angel is probably allegorical in the sense that it's a way of punishing Israel for their rebellion by banning them from entering the promised land so we have idolatry sexual morality testing

Christ and grumbling all of these are what hurt Israel's relationship with God and all of these are what the Corinthians are doing and what you and I do on a day to day basis idols sexual morality testing God and grumbling sin it doesn't matter what kind of privileges that Israel had it doesn't matter that they were the first one right because ultimately sin is destructive it doesn't matter if you were raised in a godly Christian family and received the best Bible education at home at church and for that matter at seminary sin will continue to plague your life and threaten to hurt those you value and the things you cherish but the good news is number three only

God can deliver you only God can deliver you the good news is we're not called to stand on our own verse 11 these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the culminations of the ages has come in one sentence Paul states that the Bible is not about isolated events rather there's an author a divine author who transcends space and time who put down everything and record them in scripture so that he could weave in messages of fulfillment into these earlier texts about Israel's deeds so that those quote on whom the culmination of ages have come can read back and take us warning now who are those on whom the culmination of ages has come it's everybody it's

Corinthians it's you and I it's people who live past the culmination of age which is people who are past the incarnation death and resurrection of the Messiah the Son of God anybody who lives past that are those on whom the culmination of ages has come so we have the great privilege of looking at these events the Bible in full and examine Israel and their deeds as a warning so that we don't repeat their steps and certainly these privileges should not cause us to be arrogant it should not cause us to drop our guards or compromise verse 12 so if you think you are standing firm be careful that you don't fall you see the Corinthians they have this mindset you know we live today in the age of Christian freedom we're not bind by the law right that's what you taught us right

Paul so we can go around doing whatever we want because you know what we can't lose our salvation isn't that what grace is isn't grace one holding us together we'll never sink Paul says no no no if you think you are standing firm be careful that you don't fall because you might just be that the next second you will fall the Corinthians have this mindset that they are unshakable but Paul says oh no no no you are sin entices you it comes back to cuss your throat by insisting on going to the temples by insisting that you can free to do whatever you want you are in a process of jeopardizing your faith every single time they do so the

[30 : 55] Corinthians are putting themselves in a place where they could compromise their sexual integrity and they could fall but the good news of the Christian faith is that we are not called to stand on our own strength we come now to one of the most quoted verses in 1st Corinthians verse 13 no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind 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 endure it no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind what Israel experienced is not unique the old testament lists idolatry sexual immorality and greed as three of the most fundamental temptations

Paul assures his readers even though Israel set a bad precedence actually we can still look to them for encouragement that we will not fall from faith why is that so because not all of Israel fell Joshua Caleb they were able to enter the promised land so what this means is exactly what Paul says here God is faithful he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear the fact the very fact that there was a messianic the very fact that there was people who was able from that generation to enter the promised land shows us that the temptation wasn't mission impossible so Paul tells the Corinthians don't sulk in defeat don't say this is the way I am I can't change because even when we are tempted says here he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it now sometimes God removes us from a seemingly unbearable place of temptation but other times he gives us the strength to endure it and remain faithful to it but regardless only God can deliver us brothers and sisters brothers and sisters what is your default posture towards idolatry I really want to watch this film I know there are some sexual scenes in there that could be a problem for me but that's okay everybody says it's so good I'm really just watching it you know to enjoy it to analyze it my girlfriend and I we've been dating and seeing each other for such a friend for many years now we're committed to each other a little more physical touch that should be fine right you know I'm getting this offer to work more that would cause me to be more detached from my family and from God but that's okay I'm making good money I'm providing I'm giving to the church whether it's money sex or power when they come and throw themselves at you what is your posture are you constantly thinking about what you can get away with are you trying to push buttons and tread on dangerous ground thinking that you won't fall because you will fall because you're more wicked than you think you are our hearts are deceitful and they freely attach them to different things and we elevate them to the place beyond

God above God and that's what the Corinthians are doing they elevate their sexual needs their personal fulfillment above the word of God I think a common mistake that we make when we look at 1 Corinthians 10 is we think the way out can be seen from a human perspective and by that I mean since God has provided us a way out of every temptation it's up to us it's up to us to find that way out so that in every scenario we won't sin so that the Christian life becomes a process where we make ourselves better more resistance more endurance towards sin such that we will sin lesser we will make good choices most of the time but doesn't that just sound downright impossible legalistic and self righteous see good news of the

[36 : 37] Christian faith brothers and sisters is that you need to rest you need to focus we need to focus on the faithfulness of God Jesus Christ came to be tempted so that you and I can be free from temptations in the wilderness he was tempted for physical fulfillment to turn the stone into bread he was tempted for power to worship Satan and be given the kingdoms of the earth he was tempted to test God and even up to the cross he was tempted to give up but he did not friends the key towards idolatry isn't more determination more guilt more knowledge more discipline the key is you need to be moved at what it costs to bring you home you need to see the supremacy of

Christ as being worthy of all that is on earth such that every idol will appear dull and insignificant such that you will be moved at the price that God costs at a price that costs God to bring you back into fellowship with him Lord help us in our weakness such that our life may be in response towards God love towards your love let's pray Father God we confess that our hearts are idol factories and we confess that we are always thinking about what we can get away with we always want to enjoy both the delights of this world and be satisfied in them but we also want to be good so Lord help us today to grasp the cross to grasp the beauty of Christ such that it outshines all the idols of this world and may our life live in resonance with what you have accomplished for us on top of the cross pray this in Jesus name amen■■■■ to had better can I do what is love to