

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Lent 3 -- March 7th, 2010

1 Corinthians 10:1-5, 11-13

For 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. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in 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. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 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.

Dear children of our heavenly Father. Amen

"I'll never lose my faith!" "I'll never give in to Satan's temptations!" "I'll never walk away from an opportunity to share my faith!" "I'll never cease to pray!" "I'll never put things or people before my Savior!" "I'll never miss church!" What does that sound like to you? Does that sound like a person who is confident in his faith? You'd probably say that sounds like a person who is overconfident in his faith. You'd be right, too. The unfortunate thing is that such a person may, and probably will, do the exact thing he said he would never do. "You don't need to worry about me, pastor. I'm OK in my faith." "I don't need to come to church every week. Besides, God will understand." "I don't need to go to Bible study. I'm comfortable in my faith right where I'm at."

Can a person grow weak in his faith, become spiritually lazy or indifferent, or even lose his faith? It can happen. It has happened. It can happen to me. **IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!** Paul was seeing such things happen in the church at Corinth. That is why God had Paul write this letter. It was to warn them so they would get their focus right. Jesus had ceased to be their first love.

Using the history of the early Jews, Paul showed them what to avoid and what to cling to. Paul wanted to teach them the truth about their destructive attitudes and actions, and to trust in Jesus for the ability to live according to His Word and to live eternally with Him in heaven. We can learn from Paul's instruction too.

Sermon Theme: Be Careful!

- 1. Being Abundantly blessed doesn't guarantee success**
- 2. Being greatly tempted doesn't guarantee failure**

Paul goes back into the past to bring out his point. He goes back to the people of Israel. I think you would agree that the children of Israel were truly blessed by God. God heard them cry for help and he freed them from slavery in Egypt. God led them out to the Red Sea and enabled them to cross through it on dry ground. God protected them day and night. They had nothing to fear. God fed them and sustained them on their journey to the Promised Land. They were united under God and were taken care of -- both physically and spiritually. God loved them and God gave them abundant blessings.

But the people of Israel didn't love God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind. They also didn't see themselves as blessed by God. Our text says that the Lord was not pleased with most of them, and scattered their bodies over the desert. So, what had the people of Israel done?

They did evil in the sight of God, and God took it personally. **They committed idolatry**...and so quickly too. Shortly after their God-given freedom from slavery in Egypt, they turned their backs on God and put up an idol -- a golden calf -- to worship. They broke the First Commandment. They worshiped a

god of Egypt (see Exodus 32:1-6). How ironic! That day, God killed 3,000 Israelites. **They participated in sexual immorality** with the women of Moab, who invited the Israelite men to participate in idol worship of Baal. After that event, God killed somewhere around 24,000 Israelites (see Numbers 25:1-9). **They challenged the Lord** [and Moses] over and over again. They did it once too often and God sent a plague of poisonous snakes. God killed many Israelites that day (see Numbers 21:4-9). **They grumbled against the Lord** [and Moses] constantly. They didn't listen to the Lord or take His side when others complained or challenged the Lord's authority and the leaders He established over Israel. In Numbers 16:41-50, God's righteous anger was stirred up by the ungrateful and ignorant Israelites. God sent the angel of death (probably the same one who brought the last plague upon Egypt – Exodus 12:23) and God killed 14,700 Israelites. It would have been the whole nation of Israel if Moses and Aaron had not intervened.

You and I are blessed people...blessed by our loving Savior. Yet, we have been just as sinful and rebellious as the Israelites. We need Paul's warning just as much, because we are living in the days of fulfillment. We too have been united with Jesus...through Holy Baptism; we too have been given these blessings...both physical and spiritual. Jesus' presence is constantly with us in Word and sacraments.

However, just because we belong to a church does not, in and of itself, offer an automatic guarantee that we shall reach the Promised Land of heaven. God doesn't owe us anything. We aren't deserving of any of the blessings we have. The Lord could deal with us like He did with the people of Israel, and start killing us by the thousands for our sins of grumbling and complaining and disobedience and idolatry.

During Lent, we take a spiritual inventory of ourselves and realize that we sin daily, and we acknowledge that our sins put Jesus on the cross in the same way the Israelites sins put Jesus on the cross. During Lent, we also learn from God's Word that we struggle to avoid the same sins that led the majority of ancient Israel to their destruction. [Note: except for Joshua and Caleb, all Israelites 20 years old and older would not cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land.] During Lent, we also learn that Jesus interceded for us on Calvary's cross, and still intercedes for us before the heavenly Father each day. In spite of us, Jesus loves us. We can't thank Him enough for that!

2. Being greatly tempted doesn't guarantee failure.

God included the history of Israel so that we could learn from their mistakes. The negative examples are there for us to see what to avoid. The sins the Israelites committed are sins that are common to every human being. These types of sins were committed before the Israelites committed them, and they will be committed until the world comes to an end.

But why do we repeat the sins of our forefathers? Why don't we learn from them? That is an age-old question. It's not just that we perceive Satan to be too strong to defeat, or that we are just doomed to follow in their footsteps. Perhaps we believe we are over-saturated with God and His Word. We become bored with God and with the Christian life. Some people have said that a person can get "too much" God. It's not difficult to spot apathetic Christians: they are bored with their faith, negative most of the time; they are preoccupied with the small and the petty irritations; they lack vision; they have a prideful attitude; and they have a false sense of security.

That's why God had Paul include this truth in his letter: he wrote, "**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!**" (vs.12) That can only happen when we focus on ourselves and not on Jesus. If our success against sin and Satan is based solely on what we do, we will never succeed. If our salvation was totally dependent on what we do, we will never be saved. God sent Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins; He required Jesus to pay the debt; Jesus willingly offered up His body and blood so that we could have the victory over sin, death, and the devil. Satan is on the attack constantly. Our Savior experienced that first hand, so He knows what we are going through.

We are tempted on a daily basis, and many times we think we have been tempted to the limit. But that won't happen because God promises that He will always be faithful. When He promises to protect us,

He means it. Therefore, when He tells us that we won't be tempted beyond what we can bear, He means it. Our Lord plans on giving us an escape from every temptation...an alternative to sinning. His Word is the power to defeat Satan. With God's help and power, we don't have to despair. We can overcome temptation...say NO to sin...and live for Christ. Jesus has made us winners. Winners recognize their sins, confess them, and trust in God's forgiving grace. Winners deal with their apathy and look to the Holy Spirit to replace it with joy and peace. Winners are growing in their faith. Winners are positive about the possibilities and opportunities the Lord gives them. Winners are humble and give God the glory. Winners have vision and understand God's mission. Winners focus their faith and life on Jesus, our Savior. Jesus has made us winners.

Yes, **IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!** You can slip away and fall from the grace of your loving God. All you have to do is reject Jesus and all that He has done and said. However, if you live in God's saving grace and love...if by faith you recognize how blessed you are from God...if by faith you appreciate the fact that He has made you a member of His family and an heir of eternal life...if by faith you learn from the way God disciplined the Israelites and from your own mistakes...and if by faith you lean on His promises and care, then through His grace and protection it **WON'T** happen to you! God grant that, through Jesus, our Savior. AMEN