

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Dear Friends in Christ,

You know the saying, "If you don't learn from history you are doomed to repeat it." I suppose New Year's Eve is as good a time as any to learn from history. It's usually a time when we do look back and evaluate the past and make resolutions for the future. This evening, Paul helps us learn from Israel's history. As he reviews for us some of their well-known failings, he encourages us to learn from these things to recognize our blessings and to resist complacency.

In order to set the stage for the Corinthians and for us Paul reminds us of some of the unheard of blessings that God had showered on Israel. God himself led them out of Egypt, appearing for them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. At the Red Sea the cloud gave them light as they passed through the sea on dry ground, but on the other side of the cloud, where the Egyptians were, there was pitch darkness. When, through Moses, God divided the sea and then caused it to come crashing down on Pharaoh's mighty army, the people had to acknowledge that God had appointed Moses as their leader. Paul says, **they were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.** They were saved from their enemies and set apart as God's chosen people.

The Holy Spirit caused Paul to use the word "Baptized" for a reason. He wants us to recognize that although we have not witnessed miraculous plagues and the dividing of a sea, nor have we seen the presence of God in a cloud, we have experienced a miracle. In our baptism God has rescued each of us from our enemies and set us apart as his chosen child. In our baptism he said to us, **I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you.** Make sure you recognize each day the blessing you received when God rescued you from certain death and called you to be his own in baptism.

As Israel traveled in the desert led by God's presence in the cloud, he provided for their daily needs. He gave them manna to eat, a heavenly food that provided all the nutrition their bodies needed. He gave them water, sweetening bitter water, or providing water from a rock when necessary. Paul calls this spiritual food and spiritual drink because it was miraculous. In fact Paul reminds us that the one who was miraculously providing for their physical needs was the pre-incarnate Christ.

Again, the Holy Spirit caused Paul to choose the example of food and drink for a reason. Speaking to New Testament Christians, these words remind us not only that Jesus continues to provide all that we need for our bodies and reminds us to consider the birds and the lilies if we are ever tempted to doubt his care for our physical needs, but we can't help but think of the spiritual food and drink he gives us in the Lord's Supper. What a blessing it is to know, as Paul says later in this very chapter, that the **cup of blessing which we bless is a participation in the blood of Christ and the bread we break is a participation in the body of Christ**, so that we can have absolute confidence that our sins have been paid for in full!

Although we might wish at times that we could see just one miracle and that we could have a visible indication of God's presence with us each day as Israel did in the desert, I'm sure Israel probably wished they could have some of the creature comforts we enjoy. They lived in tents in the desert. They worshiped at a tent church that they could not even enter. They had to stand outside in the hot sun while a priest made their offering for them. We live in houses they would consider mansions. We worship in churches they would consider palaces. They had to memorize the words Moses spoke to them from God. We can just Google it. They struggled to

understand the prophecies about the Messiah. We have seen them fulfilled in Jesus. We are among those **on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come**. We live in the last days eagerly awaiting Jesus' second coming in glory. We should not be envious of the blessings of any previous generation. We ought to recognize the tremendous blessings that God has showered on us.

But human nature being what it is, Paul gives us a warning. We know how Israel took their blessings for granted. They became complacent. As a result they fell into sin time and time again. They serve as a warning to us not to become complacent.

At the base of Sinai, while Moses was talking with God, they worshiped at a golden calf. It was their intention to worship the Lord through the calf, but they wanted to use the forms of worship that they had seen in Egypt that seemed a lot more fun. The Corinthians were facing the same temptation; the temptation to try to worship the Lord using the forms of worship they had grown up with at the temple of Aphrodite; forms of worship that involved immorality. We face the same temptation. We get bored with tried and true forms of worship and look for ways to worship the Lord that seem more exciting and entertaining. Yes, we have Christian freedom in our forms of worship, but we are not to use our freedom as a license to sin. We cannot worship the Lord by doing things that are immoral or that identify us with those who teach false doctrine.

When Balak's plan to have Balaam put a curse on Israel failed, Balaam suggest another way to bring a curse on Israel. He told Balak to send women to seduce the Israelites and then God would send a plague on Israel, and his plan worked. The temptation still is strong today to think, "I'm a baptized child of God, he has chosen me as his own. Jesus has paid for all my sins. If I give in to sin it's OK, I can come to communion and receive forgiveness." Paul reminds us that God put to death 24,000 Israelites who thought that way. We dare not become complacent and take the blessing of forgiveness for granted thinking that it's a license for sin.

The last two examples of complacency have to do with grumbling. Israel grumbled about the manna. They were sick of eating the same thing every day. And they grumbled against Moses, accusing him of making himself their leader and abusing his authority. Again we see the temptations of our human nature. Our cupboards are filled with all kinds of different foods, and if we can't find something we like there we can go to the grocery store or get some fast food. Yet how often don't we find ourselves grumbling that we can't find anything good to eat. And if a pastor or elder tells us something we don't want to hear—points out a sin, or preaches about money, we grumble, "Who made them judge", or "what makes them think they can tell me what to do with my money?"

We may be separated from Israel and from the Corinthians by many centuries, but we have the same sinful human nature that they had. That's why Paul says, **these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us... So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!** Recognize how blessed you are by God. Appreciate the great physical and spiritual blessings he has showered on you. Appreciate the great blessings he has given our two congregations. But as you recognize those blessings, make sure that you don't take them for granted and become complacent. Complacency leads us to let down our guard, to grow lax in our hearing and study of God's word, and when that happens, we will fall into sin as Israel did; and we are even in danger of failing to enter the Promised Land of Heaven.

For those who are appropriately humbled, for those who realize how weak they are and how strong their sinful nature is, for those who recognize that they have at times been complacent and have given in to sin, Paul gives a promise. God is in control each and every day. As he did in the case of Job he also does for us. He puts limits on Satan and his temptations. He will not allow any temptation to come to us that is beyond our ability to bear. And when he does allow a temptation to come, he promises that he will also always provide an escape route. There will be an exit sign, an egress window, a way out that doesn't involve sin. It may be just saying no. It may be to run away as Joseph did from Potiphar's wife. It may be getting a new set of friends, or asking a Christian friend for help, but there will be a way out. That's God's promise to you and me.

At the end of the year, as we think about the past, no matter what has happened we have to admit with Jacob, we are not worthy of all the blessings, physical and spiritual, that God has showered upon us. As we move forward into the New Year, we need to be on guard. Our sinful nature is strong. It's all too easy to take our blessings for granted, to become complacent, to let down our guard or think we have a license to sin. Learn from Israel's history. Watch out, be on guard against complacency. But remember that God is faithful, Jesus proves it.