

## Warnings, Patience, and Unfair Love

In 1 Cor 10 Paul reminds the Corinthian Church that the people of the Old Covenant were not without the promises, patience, and work of God in their midst.

He reminds them that the people of the Old Covenant, not only had the promises of the Messiah, they had the Messiah, as the Rock that followed them, giving them life-giving water, was Christ, the Word before he became flesh. He was with them.

Not only did they have this Saving God with them, this saving God also gave them signs. The spiritual food, the manna from heaven, was on the ground every day, except the sabbath, and yet it didn't deteriorate that day like other days.... It couldn't be a natural phenomenon, no it was from God. In addition, they had the cloud, the sea parting, they had these pre-figurements of baptism, Paul calls it, as they were able to go through the waters and clouds. They had God's presence, they had his gifts among them.

And we might think at the end of verse 4 then, with all that, that these people must have been so faithful, so joyous, so solid on that foundation.

But verse 5 gives us whiplash – “Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”

“What!? God, why are you displeased with them?”

Verse 6 – “They desired evil.” They were idolators, and the quote there is from the golden calf scene. They were sexually immoral – and 23 thousand die. They put Christ, that rock, to the test, hitting it, doubting his promises to provide, and so poison came until something was lifted up to heal them... remember that? That serpent on a pole? Can that point to something, or someone,

lifted up to heal us? But back to the text, we read that at other times they grumbled, “It was so much better in Egypt, we loved Egypt, lets go back to Egypt, God and Moses want us dead out here...”

With the presence of God and with all his gifts around them, for them... they despised the Lord, his prophet Moses, and his gifts.

Why is Paul telling that Greek Church this Old Testament, Jewish, history? Two times, verse 6 and verse 11, Paul reminds us these, real and historical events, serve as examples for us.

How? We don't have manna on the ground, we don't have the seas parting, we don't have the pillar and the cloud... We seem like totally different people in totally different circumstances. We are even further removed from these Old Testament people than even the Corinthians! How does this help us?

And we might even think, “With all those signs and miracles, wow, must have been easy for them to believe. It's almost astonishing that they could see all that and still think God wouldn't save them...” If you are tempted to think about how easy it was for them, well, you are in luck, because you too can leave your home behind and head into the wilderness and let someone else lead you around, hopefully to some water every once in a while. You'd love that wouldn't you? Wouldn't grumble and complain at all, right?

We sit here in the pews and we are like the Old testament people in that we too are surrounded by God's presence and his gifts. i don't think any of us are starving, we get our daily bread. And while we haven't seen the sea part, have we not heard of the testimony of the greater exodus, of Jesus coming out of the tomb alive?! Do we not know where the waters of life flow? From the Messiah and Savior who promises to be where two or more are gathered? Do we not know of his

promises in word and sacrament that are around us? We are here in the pews just like the Old Testament people, with God's presence and with his gifts.

“And none of us commit sexual immorality...” Oh wait – it's more rampant and accessible than ever. And we might think, “Well ok, but none of us are idolators!” And praise God, no, we don't bow down to calves of gold, but we do find security and comfort in money and medicine (which, don't get me wrong, are gifts!) but if you doubt me, sell all you have, give to the poor and put those meds away.... Oh wait... Maybe we do trust in those things a bit... “But that's ok because none of us would put Christ to the test! None of us have ever thought or said, ‘God if you would just give me a sign (other than the sign of Jonah of course...), then I'd never doubt!’” And none of us, surely, none of us grumble ever - “God what are you doing? How could this be for my good? God this isn't fair! It isn't what I signed up for!”

No, on second thought, maybe we do share in the struggles of the Old Testament Church as well... As the Corinthians did. And so Paul bids the Corinthians, us, to take heed.

And we want to make excuses for how it's different for us than them, and how it's harder for us than them, or the Corinthians, But Paul takes the excuses away: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.”

You share in the same struggles of fallen mankind, and so, believe it or not, yes you can bite that tongue, yes you can purify that mind and eye, yes you can make it your last drink, yes you can.

“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

No excuse.

We do not, like the people in Ezekiel's day, get to say, "God, you aren't just! You aren't fair!" As if we have been treated worse than others.

In fact, in Ezekiel, God basically responds by saying, "Really? You want to talk about fair? You want to talk about Justice. We can talk about Justice. We can talk about what we deserve according to our works. We can talk about floods and towers and cancers and death if we want to talk about what we deserve."

And so we sit here imperfect, far worse than that, though, no? And like the Corinthians, like the people of the Old Testament, how might we stand before the Holy God if he kept a record of sins, if he gave us only what we deserved, if he did not deal with us in patience, even if that patience means a heaping or two of manure on us? How can we come before God if he did not call us, and by his Spirit, bring us in repentance to himself? We couldn't.

So praise God that he is not pleased in to answer us according to each sin. He is not playing wack-a-sinner, tossing over towers with glee. No, he says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

His Work and gifts then are to save. To make for himself a holy people, a spotless bride, that he might rejoice in and with.

And to make us, even us, so, he does things so unfairly. He says in Ezekiel "the righteous will live," and we think that is good news. No, that's bad news for us, because we aren't righteous on our own. But then in a great mystery and according to God's plan: the ONLY truly righteous One, Jesus, Doesn't "live", but is handed over to die. And he goes willingly, unfairly, to an unjust death that we might receive his righteousness, received in faith, that we might live forever.

He goes to death, that we might live, because he is faithful. He is the way of escape from sin and temptation that we fail in so often. He is the rock and foundation that follows us, that we might know he is always there to lean on. To forgive. To raise up, even as he is raised up to never die again.

This is our hope as our sinful flesh and temptation assault us. This is our confidence and rest when we look inside and see how inadequate we are – that God is with us, that his gifts are among us to give us living water flowing from a cross. If you look it up, Paul goes immediately from this text to talking about communion, I don't think that's an accident. This is our promise that Jesus is with us just as he was to sustain his people of old.

Our God is patient and Kind and abounding in steadfast, (dare we say, unfair?) love. This love has been shown to you in Jesus, it's benefits have been promised to you in Word and Sacrament, you will stand on the last day with saints of old, not because of some set of excuses, no, but because the righteous One, Jesus, has taken your wickedness and the cruel unfair punishment it deserves, and given you, in exchange, his righteousness.