

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 10:6-12 - A Dire Warning From Long Ago

This morning...we're going to back to Bible land. We are going to be here in 1 Corinthians but in order to understand what Paul is getting at we need to understand the stories he has in mind.

Now, just a heads up: these are not the heart warming tales of God saving Elisha and his servant from the Syrian army. These are not God's miraculous deliverance when all hope seems to be lost.

The stories we're going to look at are the stories of God's righteous judgment on idolatrous people. AND the people he judges, it turns out, is Israel. They tend to want to sin - idolatry and sexual immorality most of all - and as a result there's judgement. And we need to understand these stories because the same holy God who judged people in the OT is the same holy God whom we worship now through faith in Jesus.

Nothing has changed. In fact, we could say that the standards God has for us in the NC are even higher than his standards in the OC. God has made it explicit that the followers of Jesus are to be holy from the inside out.

Remember Paul is addressing this issue of idolatry in the Church at Corinth. Idolatry has crept into the lives of the Christians. And Paul has addressed this in several ways as we've seen so far. This morning we're going to see that the bottom line for Paul here is that God doesn't play around with idolatry because he is holy.

There is nothing more offensive to the one true God of the universe than to commit idolatry. Because when someone commits idolatry it's saying either 1) God doesn't exist or 2) God isn't the only one who we should worship.

It's a violation of the very first commandment: You shall have no other gods before me.

And it's usually a violation of the second commandment: **Exo. 20:4-5**: You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me..."

God is a jealous God. He will allow no competition for worship. And these 2 commandments are given because he knows that people are prone to worship other things. We're prone to worship someone else, anything else. John Calvin once said that our hearts are a factory of idols. Our hearts have assembly lines and conveyor belts and machinery working 24/7 cranking out idols.

We need to be reminded continually that our God alone is worthy of all our praise and worship.

Paul says as much here. **Read 6**

Remember last week we talked about how the Israelites had been delivered out of Egypt. They were baptized, in a sense, in the Red Sea. And they ate, in a sense, the Lord's Supper in the wilderness as God provided the manna and the water miraculously. And yet most of them proved that they weren't truly the people of God.

They serve as examples for us. The Greek word is "typoi" - a precursor - to us. And God raised them up as an illustration for us to know what not to do.

He worked with that generation, and he sovereignly uses that generation as an everlasting example for us to take note of.

And he wants us to take note of 4 examples from the OT. We're going to turn back and look at these examples and then come back. But let me make a few comments.

First of all, these are all examples of evil hearts. **Read 6**

There's no virtue in any of what we're about to read. Why does that matter? Because usually when people who claim to be Christian commit sin - and especially idolatry and sexual immorality - they try to justify it for the greater good. They even try to make it out so that God gets the glory. That's never the case. It's evil.

Second, there's a variety of sins here that we'll see - all of which the Corinthians were dabbling in. There's:

Idolatry in **Vs. 7**

Sexual Immorality in **Vs. 8**

Putting Jesus to the Test in **Vs. 9**

Complaining in **Vs. 10**

All of these sins are a rejection of God. So let's take a little tour through the OT and then we'll come back and put this together. Let's look first of all at the sin of idolatry from **Exodus 32**. **Turn** there.

This is the Golden calf incident. Israel has just come out of Egypt, delivered by God. And they are at the base of Mt. Sinai and are overwhelmed at the awesome majesty of God. And so God through a series of events God calls Moses to come up. Well, Moses is delayed for a while and the people get a little restless. They want to hear from Yahweh. So Aaron - high priest that he is - is going to make them a Yahweh. **Read 1-6**

This is one of the most infamous acts of idolatry in Israel's history. It's an absolute betrayal of God. But it's subtle. Did you notice that Aaron doesn't say that this is some other god. He says this golden thing I just made is who brought you out of Egypt. **Read 5**

He's saying that the golden calf is Yahweh. He's giving honor to God, right? No, he's violating the first 2 commandments. And the people are eating and drinking and rising up to play. It's a gluttonous feast of sexual immorality. The idea of "rose up to play" isn't talking about playing soccer. It's a euphemism for sexual immorality.

So God tells Moses what's going on and he heads down there. **Read 19-24**

Something we need to understand is that sin begets more sin. People who take part in idolatry aren't ever just these nice folks who have a little bit of a mixed up conception of God but otherwise their lives are charming quiet lives. No, when you reject the true and living God for an idol your whole life gets turned upside down. We see idolatry, sexual immorality and now we see lying. "I tossed the gold in and out came this calf."

Really? You sure about that? Look at God's response. **Read 25-35**

God's not playing around is he? 3,000 people die at the hands of the priests. And **then** the Lord sends a plague.

The same holy God that delivered Israel out of Egypt is the same holy God who delivered us out of our sin through Jesus. The requirement of holiness hasn't changed.

Do not be idolators, Paul says.

Paul also said: We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. Remember that? Well, that's from **Numbers 25:1-9**

Turn over there for a moment. Now this is right after the whole Balaam incident. Remember there was a time when the people of Israel were growing and growing. and a guy named Batak, the King of Moab, wanted to curse Israel. And so he summoned a Jewish prophet named Balaam. Remember that?

And Balak tried to get Balaam to prophecy bad things about Israel. But Balaam couldn't, even though he wanted to for money. Balaam could only proclaim blessings. God had miraculously directed his mouth to only proclaim blessings. So Balak, the king of Moab got mad. But Balaam wanted his money so he came up with a

solution: If I can't prophecy evil against Israel, maybe we can get them to sin. And so what he did was to set prostitutes to lure the men of Israel away from God. And it worked. And it actually became a massive problem in Israel. **Read 25:1-9**

This one probably doesn't make it into a lot of children's Bibles.

So where did the men of Israel end up going according to **Vs 2**? They went to the temple of Baal to eat. What's going on in Corinth? They're going to the temples to eat. What's it called when Jews go to the pagan temple of Baal to eat? Idolatry. What's it called when Christians go to pagan temples to eat? Idolatry.

Notice here, the sin that gets them to the temple is the sin of sexual immorality. And God kills 24,000 of them because of that.

Their sexual immorality led them into idolatry and God judged them. It never goes well with sexual immorality.

This is the connection Paul is making. Remember one of the problems in Corinth was that some people in their supposed Christian liberty thought they could go to the prostitutes at the pagan temples. Nothing new under the sun - people have always tried to justify sexual immorality and idolatry. But God has never allowed idolatry or sexual immorality among his people. He is holy.

Side: Why does Numbers say 24,000 and Paul say 23,000? I don't know if you caught that. In short, I think Numbers is talking about everyone who was killed - the chiefs plus all the other people who died by plague. Paul seems to be just talking about the people who died by plague because they actually committed the sin.

In any case, no idolatry, no sexual immorality. The third example was no on putting Christ to the test and people were destroyed by serpents.

The third example is those who put Christ to the test and were destroyed by serpents. **Turn back to Num. 21:4-9.**

Most of us know about this story because Jesus mentions it in **John 3**. The people of Israel are wandering in the wilderness. **Read 4-9**

What's the sin they are judged for? Impatience and complaining and grumbling."God, you're not providing what we want! You're not giving us what we need!" God's like, "Send in the snakes and kill them."

Talk about a crazy judgment. Can you imagine the next time you start complaining and you look around and there are snakes of fire everywhere attacking you? You guys, that's actually what we deserve for our sin. Our God is a holy God and deserve thanks and praise and worship no matter what comes our way because we are sinful. It was his mercy that kept all of Israel from dying. And it's his mercy that keeps us from dying.

By the way, you remember that Jesus likens himself to this bronze serpent in John 3. He says the serpent was lifted up - and saved the people. And he will be lifted up - on the cross - and will save people. And the only requirement for salvation is to look and believe.

Paul says in **1 Cor. 10**: We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents. This is Jesus sending in the snakes. This is Jesus our Lord - holy and pure - judging these people.

The Israelites put Jesus to the test here and, honestly, we often put him to the test with our complaining. Yet he is the same holy God he has always been. And we should be careful not to fall into grumbling and complaining.

The 4th example Paul mentions in **1 Cor. 10** is that some grumbled and were destroyed by the destroyer. So it's another example of grumbling. When did that happen?

Well, it turns out unit happened a lot. No one is 100% sure if Paul had a specific event in mind, or all of these events put together. I tend to think he had several events in mind. **Look at Num. 11:1-3. Read**

I mean think about this: God is doing to Israel what he did to Sodom and Gomorrah because Israel grumbled. In fact it was such a display of power they named the place Taberah which means burning.

Look at Num. 14. So remember God leads Israel out of Egypt. They go to Mt Sinai and eventually make their way to the east side of the Jordan River. And they send in 12 spies to spy out the Promised Land. God wants them to get a taste for how good it is. When they come back after 40 days of searching out the land 2 of the spies - Caleb and Joshua - are ready to go take it. But the other 10 spies cause all of Israel to sin by complaining that the people are too big. What's God do? Three guesses. **Read 14:26-38**

Not only did God specifically kill the 10 spies with a plague but he also says that the entire generation that died in the wilderness was specifically being judged by him. Their death in the wilderness - though it took 40 years - was an act of judgment on them.

One other time that's worth mentioning is 2 chapters later in **Num 16.** in what is called Korah's rebellion. I'll let you read the whole chapter on your own. But the gist here is that God had made the Aaron and his family line the priests of Israel. Aaron was of the tribe of Levi, but only Aaron and his family of the Levites could be priests. No other family could represent Israel at the Tabernacle or Temple. But Korah and some other guys wanted that privilege.

So there's this big show down where Korah and his group get together and Moses and Aaron get together for God to decide who the real priests are going to be. **Read 16:8-11, 16-35**

Wow. God doesn't play with grumbling. He doesn't play with complaining. Grumbling and complaining is inherently idolatrous because it's say "God you are doing a bad job. I know better than you what I need. I have superior wisdom and knowledge and you're doing it wrong." It's saying that God's sovereign reign is not legitimate.

Now, with all of that history fresh in our minds, let's go back to **1 Cor. 10. Read 6-11**

Twice Paul says that these things were written down for our instruction. One of the reasons we should be reading through Exodus and Numbers and Jeremiah and all the rest is because those things were written down for us. They are examples to give us instruction.

And much more for us. Paul says in **Vs. 10** that the end of the ages has come to us. What does that mean? Remember that at the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit we have entered into the Last Days. The End Times or Last Days is not a bad period of time right before Jesus comes again. Biblically speaking, the Last Days - or end of the ages - is all this time between the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost until Jesus returns. We've been in the Last Days for 2,000 years.

And what Paul is saying is that even though we're in the Last Days under the NC, the events in the OT that happened under the OC still instruct us. We can learn from them and grow in holiness and godliness.

And here's the practical application. **Read 12**

If you you think you're going to go headlong into idolatry and complaining and sexual immorality and somehow pawn it off that God is okay with all of that, think again.

Take heed, lest you fall. What did it mean to fall in all those passages that we read? It meant to die.

I don't know if you caught this, but God is very creative in how he ends the lives of people who grumble against him: fire from heaven, serpents, spears, plague, opening the earth to swallow them alive.

We worship that same God. **Vs. 9** says we must not put Christ to the test as some of them did. They were messing with Jesus. Jesus doesn't take that lightly.

Listen when it comes to grumbling and complaining, we need to put those things to death. Whatever comes our way in life isn't a fraction as bad as what we deserve.

And for those of us in Christ, we know this. We know we are utterly depraved sinners whom God has shown unconditional mercy.

You guys, what good thing has God withheld from us? What spiritual blessing? We have all his blessings in the heavenly places. We have every grace we need. We have every provision we need. We have eternal life knowing the one true and living God.

Why would we ever play with idolatry? Why would we even grumble or complain or be satisfied with sexual immorality? Our holy God has given us grace upon grace.

Don't walk in darkness, walk in light. Stand firm in righteousness and in the grace he's given us.

Pray