



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1 Corinthians

“A Way of Escape”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We’re going through 1 Corinthians chapter by chapter, verses by verse, and we’re in chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians this morning and we’re going to look at verses 1-13.

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.” Now we’ve got some interesting statements in those first four verses that we’ll consider. Not at great length, but baptized into Christ and the spiritual rock which is Christ, we want to consider what those expressions mean. Verse 5, “Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

“Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.’ Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what

you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” May God bless this reading of His Word and bless us as we consider this very sobering passage. Let’s pray.

Father, this is a sobering text and so we pray that as we come to You, as we come before the throne of grace this morning, we pray that You would bless us with an understanding of the things that Paul has said. He was concerned for the spiritual condition of those who were in Corinth. There were many good things that could be said about those Corinthians. Many of them were mature. They had knowledge. They had understanding. And yet the danger that they had was that in their knowledge, in their understanding, they could become over confident, and then careless, and then fall into sin. And we have a pattern of the danger of that in Israel. And so, Father, Paul instructed them and he’s instructing us. This is the instruction of the Spirit of God for your people in every age. And so I pray in this age of materialism and great temptation, we live in an age in which the whole of our society, the whole fabric of our culture is inundated with temptations to go after the idols of this age and participate in the life of this age, which is very sensual, carnal. And it’s difficult to resist. It’s so easy to become subverted by it, unaware, become careless, and stumble.

So, Father, this is a difficult text. It’s not an enjoyable text to consider, really. It’s about sin, and danger, and the warnings that are for us. And yet we need them. We need to have a sober look at our lives and at the world in which we live, and we need to be warned, to be cautious. And so I pray that You’d give us the proper instruction and that you would give us the warnings we need and that we will heed them. May we not be so confident that we think we stand and then fall.

So, Lord, bless us with knowledge and understanding. Guide us through this text. What a blessing it is to know that we’re not at Believers Chapel, or anywhere for that matter, dependent upon a man in a pulpit to teach us and instruct us, that we have as believers the Spirit of God within us who is our teacher, guide, who will illuminate our minds and we pray for that. May we be open to that. May we be yielded to Him. But we are particularly privileged here in this assembly to have gifted men who can fill in at any time. And I am particularly thankful for that. Thank You for the heritage of this church. We have been well taught over the decades. And thank You for the many teachers we have at all levels. I pray Your blessings upon them, but may we be grateful for what we have, but yet may we not be overconfident because of some knowledge that we possess. We are, as Abraham described himself, dust and ashes, and we are weak and we can stumble. So help us to constantly think of Christ and fix our minds on Him, be guided by Him.

Father, we need spiritual guidance and blessing. We need material help, as well. And we think of those who are sick and those who are recovering from surgeries, some very serious. We pray that You’d bless them and give them healing, give them encouragement. Bless those who are discouraged because of a lack of employment or just difficulties at work or within the home. Encourage them. Give them a sense of Your presence and Your help. You are as much with us as You were with Israel in the wilderness and You will take care of us. Help us to remember that. Bless us now as we continue in worship and bless our special music that You would prepare our hearts with that. We look to You to bless us now, in Christ’s name, Amen.

There is an old legend about a labyrinth that young Greeks would enter, get lost in its winding passages, and devoured by the monster that lived within it, the minotaur. You’re familiar with the story, I’m sure. A labyrinth, of course, is a maze. It’s a puzzle. It’s easy to get in. It’s hard to get out. And that’s true of sin. Easy to enter. Hard to escape. And like the labyrinth in the story, people die there because sin is deadly.

That’s Paul’s lesson for us this morning in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. He’s continuing the lesson from the previous chapters where he has spoken of Christian liberty and instructed the Corinthians to protect the weak from violating their conscience. The issue is the right to eat meat she has been offered to an idol. Christians are free to do that. They are free to eat anything, but they should avoid doing something that might offend an immature believer, those who are recent converts out of paganism had scruples or objections about doing such things as that, eating such things as that which had been offered to an idol. They felt that it was sin. They had sinful associations with it. Paul’s worry was if they, these younger believers, witnessed a mature believer partaking of idol food or dining out in a pagan shrine, they might be influenced to imitate that individual and, in so doing, do what they considered sin. So that what is not sin in and of itself would be sin for them, because they’d be violating their conscience. So Paul urged people not to do anything that might lead to that, might injure in some way the young, the weak, the over scrupulous with the use of their Christian liberties.

But Paul knew that other people in the church weren’t scrupulous enough about their activities. They weren’t concerned enough about sin. Maybe some of the so-called mature, those who had knowledge, who liked to dine in the pagan temples, would fit with that concern. There’s always the danger of letting Christian liberty lead to license.

There’s always the danger of becoming neglectful or even overconfident about ourselves and then falling into sin. Paul ended chapter 9 with the warning about being disqualified, or as the King James version puts it “becoming a castaway.” Now, that is a real danger for a Christian. Not becoming castaway from salvation. We can’t lose our salvation, but there is a real danger of becoming severely stained with sin.

And that’s the warning Paul now gives in chapter 10. And what he shows is that if Christians are neglectful, if we are careless, even our privileges, the blessings that we have received won’t protect us from failure and its consequences. And to prove that point, to develop his argument, he goes back to the Old Testament to demonstrate this with a number of examples from Israel, from Israel’s experience in the wilderness, its wanderings, its experience in the Exodus. All of that provides a wealth of proof for the very concern that Paul has because Israel failed in spite of its blessings.

He begins by reminding them of all of the privileges that the Israelites had. He says they were “all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;” What a privileged people they were. They were led out of Egypt by a spectacular pillar of cloud and fire. It directed their way through the trackless desert. It protected them from the heat of day and the cold of night. It protected them from the Egyptians when they came after the Israelites. Pharaoh caught up with them at the Red Sea and things looked hopeless. There was between Pharaoh and Israel this pillar of cloud of fire that kept the Egyptians at bay, but there the Egyptians were behind them, and there the sea was before them. And the Israelites felt trapped and terrified. In fact, they thought God had led them to their doom when Moses said, “Do not fear. Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord.” The sea parted and the Israelites walked over on dry ground. When the Egyptians pursued, the water collapsed and drowned all of Pharaoh’s army. It was a great deliverance, a miraculous deliverance.

It only continued. Paul says that “all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;” meaning they were joined to Moses as their leader there. People have made a lot out of this idea of baptism. Too much should not be made of it. The basic idea of baptism is to be united with someone or identified with them. It sounds strange to us to be “baptized into Moses.” We are used to being baptized into Christ. That makes some sense. But “baptized into Moses” is an odd expression to us.

But what we are doing in Christian baptism is publicly showing that we are united to Christ. And Israel became united with Moses and loyal to him as a people to its leader. The deliverance at the Red Sea proved that he was God’s man for him, their deliverer. And so in that sense, they were baptized into Moses. They were united to him. He as their leader, they as his people. And he was a great leader. He had wisdom. Moses is almost unique of all the Old Testament characters. He spoke to God face to face. No man spoke to God face to face. Moses did. Moses had power. He did miracles. What a privilege to have a man like Moses to lead them.

Further, the Lord provided for them daily. Paul writes that “all ate the same spiritual food;” It was real food. It was material food. Paul wasn’t denying that by calling it “spiritual,” but it’s spiritual food in the sense that it was miraculous. God gave them manna every day out in the desert where there is nothing, where nothing lives. He provided them daily with this spiritual food. It was his faithful, supernatural provision for the people. And he provided it to everyone. That’s what Paul says. “All ate.” In other words, Israel’s failure cannot be traced to a lack of blessing for some. It’s not as though most ate but some didn’t and they became uncomfortable or discontent, or some ate and most didn’t and that accounts for the grumbling and the rebellion. No. Not at all. “All ate.” All were cared for and cared for abundantly.

Paul adds in verse 4 that “all drank the same spiritual drink,” which is a reference to the water that came from the rock at the beginning at Rephidim, when they come not long after the Exodus and they’re without water, and God instructs Moses, “Strike the rock,” and water would come forth, and he did, and it did, and they were abundantly provided with fresh water there in the midst of the desert, and then it happened again at the end of the wanderings. And that’s what he’s referring to here. Again, it was supernatural. It’s “spiritual drink” for that reason.

But Paul also adds it was symbolical. “For - ” he says “ - they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.” Presents a very interesting picture, doesn’t it, “the rock that followed them”? But Paul doesn’t mean by that that the rock literally followed the nation as it wandered through the desert, but that the rock is a picture of Christ who was with the people wherever they went.

In the Old Testament, God is called the rock. In Deuteronomy 32:15, He is called the “rock of salvation.” So Paul is here saying that Christ is God, God the Son. He existed in time past. In fact, He has no beginning and no end. He is the alpha and the omega. And He was there with Israel. They had Moses. More importantly, they had Christ. That’s the reason they were constantly protected from harm and constantly, continually sustained with the food and water that God gave them and gave them miraculously and abundantly. The nation was blessed and blessed as no nation has been blessed. All the people were. There were no exceptions to that. Still, that didn’t keep them from failure. That did not keep them from sin.

Verse 5, “Nevertheless,” that is in spite of all of these blessings, this constant care that God gave them, “nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.” With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, that entire generation from 20 years and older died in the desert. None of them entered the promised land. The Sinai became a cemetery. Not because of natural death, but because of God’s judgment. God was not pleased with them. He was not pleased with them because they rebelled, and as a consequence, He judged them, He destroyed them. Charles Hodge, the great Princeton theologian, wrote, “Their path through the desert could be traced by the bones of those who perished through the judgments of God.” What a vivid picture that gives us. A trail of bones because of judgment.

Well, there are important lessons for us to learn from Israel’s history. In fact, that’s largely the reason these things were recorded in the Bible, to instruct us in the church. What an amazing fact that is, but that’s what Paul says in verse 6. He explains the reason for these events. They happen, he says, as examples for us so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Disobedience, in other words, is dangerous. It’s appealing. It doesn’t just happen. We don’t adopt a attitude or a pattern of rebellion and disobedience because it is unattractive. It’s not as though the things we desire have a big danger sign connected to them or are plastered with a skull and crossbones to warn us. They become attractive to us. There’s something about sin and temptation that’s very alluring and we crave it. We can. That’s what Israel did. That’s the way their interest is described, a strong desire for it.

And it’s the same today. We live in an age that has great temptations all around us, and it’s attractive. But what Paul is telling us here, what we see all through Israel’s history, what the Bible declares consistently is it leads to discipline. So we need to be diligent about our spiritual safety and vigilant about temptation. We have spiritual blessings greater than those that Israel had. Just think about what we have. Think about our privileged positions as believers in Jesus Christ. We have eternal redemption, eternal life, can’t be taken from us. It’s ours as a free gift through faith alone. We have the protection of Jesus Christ. We have the leading of the Holy Spirit. That’s far better than any pillar of cloud. The Spirit of God lives within us. Our hearts are sealed with the Spirit. We also have a completed canon. We have the whole Bible.

The Israelites had the great privilege of Moses, the lawgiver. They had him as a teacher. They had him as one who was writing out the Scriptures during that period of wandering. The first five books of the Bible were written during that time. That’s a privilege. But we have 66 books of the Bible. Now we can learn the lessons of Israel, the lessons that that nation gives to us, the warnings that are there. We have all of that. We can learn from that. We have great blessings and privileges. But, of course, if we neglect those lessons and ignore the dangers around us, our blessings, our privileges won’t keep us from the tragedy of failure any more than Israel’s privileges and blessings kept them from their tragedies and disappointments.

John Calvin gives the point here very simply that what’s being taught here is that if God did not spare them, He will not spare us. And that’s true. That’s the warning. So Paul gets very specific and lists the dangers that they needed to avoid in Corinth. In verse 7, he warns them against idolatry. “Do not be idolaters,” he said. Why would he think that that was a danger for them? Well, because Paul knew human nature and he knew the risks that existed for people, especially for those who had knowledge, for those who had a deeper understanding of things. Those he’s been speaking of who knew that an idol is nothing.

And he knew that those who treated the weaker brothers with indifference and were unwilling to waive their rights to help them could also treat idolatry flippantly and fall into it. If they are unconcerned about the weaker brethren, then they can become careless about sin. If they’re careless about those that they are to love and put ahead of themselves,

they’ll be careless about the temptations that surround them. And he can see that this understanding that they had of idolatry and food that’s offered to it, that that could, if they’re not careful, become a pretext for sin. They could become careless.

And there are dangers in idolatry, and again Israel gives an example of that for the Corinthians. Paul quotes Exodus 32:6-7, which refers to that well-known incident of the golden calf. “as it is written, ‘THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.’ ” Now Paul allowed for eating food sacrificed to idols, but he never endorsed participating in idolatrous worship. The Israelites not only ate meat sacrificed to idols, to that golden calf. They actually sacrificed to the idol, and had a banquet as part of their worship, which quickly turned into an orgy. That’s what he’s referring to here when he says, “and stood up to play.” That’s putting it mildly. That’s the way the text puts it, but they engaged in sexual immorality, and that was often a part of pagan religion.

It was in Corinth. There were temple prostitutes at many of the shrines in the city, and the city was full of temples. So there was a lot of this. It was all around them. So Paul warns against immorality in verse 8, and he gives another example from Israel’s history that shows the danger of it and the dangerous consequences of it. The incident he refers to is found in Numbers 25, when the men of Israel committed fornication with the women of Moab. Judgment came in a plague that killed 23,000 in one day. Imagine that, 23,000 people falling in one day. Now what is significant about that is that happened at the end of the wanderings with the godly generation that would conquer Canaan and inherit the land. They were the faithful generation. Not even they were immune to failure. They had an example of the golden calf. They knew the consequences of false worship. They knew what happened to their parents’ generation when they fell into that sin. Still, with that knowledge fresh on their minds, they fell with tragic consequences. And what it illustrates for us is there is never a time when we can be lax about sin. There is never a time when we can be casual about it. We must always be circumspect about our lives, about where we are, what we’re doing, who we’re doing it with.

And that was a warning for the Corinthians, for all of them. But especially for the so-called strong, the knowledgeable among them, those who might take a careless attitude towards idolatry because **they say**, “Well, it’s nothing.” They can dismiss it as nothing and then take it very casually. It’s nothing to take casually. Idolatry always exposes

people to danger. And they need to be very careful about it. They were free to eat whatever and wherever they wanted, but they needed to be wise about that, and wise in the use of their freedom, and probably be very circumspect and deny themselves for their own good. Now, I’m sure those Corinthian Christians with their knowledge would have insisted that they had no intention of engaging in idolatry when they went to dine out at the local temple.

But, you see, that’s often the mindset of people when they fall into sin. Often, people don’t intend to sin when they fall into it. It may be – and it often happens. And you hear this, and I think it’s true, that often we are weak and vulnerable after a great triumph. I think you see that often in the Scriptures. We’ve had a great spiritual triumph, and then we let down our guard and we begin to think things are fine and easy and something happens. It happens, sin, when we’re careless and we put ourselves in dangerous places and expose ourselves to temptation. Those temples in Corinth were full of temptation. So Paul was warning the Corinthians to be careful about where they went and who they spent their time with. So while they were free to go there and eat food sacrificed to idols, it was rarely wise to it.

Now this danger of immorality was connected to idolatry, but regardless of the allure of religion, immorality is enticing in itself. It doesn’t have to be connected with a shrine. It’s not connected with shrines in our day. It’s everywhere around us, and so this applies to us and it’s a great temptation and a deadly trap. You see this all through the Word of God. You see it all through the Old Testament. I’m struck by it in the book of Proverbs how often the Proverbs deal with the adulterous woman or the harlot. You see it very clearly in Proverbs 7, a whole chapter given to that, a scenario that’s laid out of how it happens, kind of an anatomy of sin as it unfolds in regards to a young man. But you go throughout the book and there are verses that deal with it. Go all the way to 23:27, and the wise man writes, “a harlot is a deep pit And an adulterous woman a narrow well.” It is hard to get out of deep holes. People die in them.

Back in the winter, I think it was in the month of February, an experienced climber fell into the crater of Mount Saint Helens when the ledge he was standing on crumbled. He was experienced. He’d been up there a number of times, as I remember, and where he stood looked safe. It wasn’t. He fell to his death. Now how many people, mature people,

experienced men and women have fallen into moral pits when they felt safe, they felt secure, they had no thought of those kinds of things when they were overcome because they were careless or they simply were overcome by the enticement of it, the promise of pleasure. It’s that problem of the labyrinth. It’s easy to enter but it is hard to exit. Sin is entangling. Sin is enslaving. I have to say I don’t enjoy preaching on this subject of sin and all. In one sense, it’s very easy to hammer on these kinds of things. It’s almost I don’t think I’m saying anything you don’t know. But it’s what we come to in the text and the Spirit of God I think would say to us we need to hear this every once in awhile. We need these kinds of warnings, particularly in the day in which you people live.

I think that’s what the Lord would say to us. And so it’s true. We need to hear about these things. It’s so easy to fall into these moral pits. It becomes enslaving. And we need to hear it because we as believers in Jesus Christ, and I don’t know how knowledgeable we all are, but let’s assume for a moment that we have a lot of knowledge. If you’ve been here for many years and you’ve been attentive, you’ve sat under the ministry of Dr. Johnson and Bill McRae and others, you have some knowledge. We’re not immune, nevertheless, to the temptations of sin and we’re not exempt from sin’s consequences. As Calvin said, “If God did not spare them, He will not spare us.” If He didn’t spare those people with all their privileges, He won’t spare us.

Flirting with sin, going near the edge of the pit is not only dangerous, it is testing the Lord. That’s what Paul warns of in the next verse, in verse 9, with another example from Israel’s failure. It’s found in Numbers 21, where the people complained about the difficulty of the journey. They complained about that all through the journey. They grumbled continually, but they complained about the food that God gave them. They got tired of that manna. They called it “this miserable food.” And through their complaint, they challenged the Lord to provide them with something that they desired rather than accepting God’s provision and trusting in His way as being best for them. They knew something better. “We want a different menu. We’re tired of this manna. We know better than the Lord does,” is what they were saying.

And in Corinth, they were really doing the same thing. They were testing God by seeing how far they could go in idolatry, how close they could get to it all, how much they could get away with, how close they could get to the edge, how close they could get to the

flame. They were testing the Lord in the way they were behaving. But in both situations, the children of Israel and the Christians of Corinth, they exhibit in this an attitude of being unhappy with the conditions that God had laid down for them. They were pushing for something else. They were pushing for their own way.

Well, as we look at the Lord throughout the Word of God, but as you look at Him particularly in these wilderness wanderings, with the nation before He brings them out of Egypt and all through the wanderings, you see God being very patient with the people. And He is long suffering, but His patience runs out. And when it did with Israel, He sent snakes into the camp, and many of them died from their bites. Fiery serpents came because they grumbled, complained. Well, that was a warning to the Corinthians to be cautious about idolatry and careful about their Christian liberty.

There is an attitude behind the kind of carelessness that Paul is warning of here. It’s one of ingratitude that produces complaining about our circumstances. That’s what Paul warns of in verse 10. He tells them not to grumble as some did in Israel, “and were destroyed by the destroyer.” This was a recurring problem. The people frequently grumbled against God all through the wilderness, from the beginning to the end. Just after walking through the Red Sea, they became thirsty and they grumbled about water. They grumbled about their leaders. Then they grumbled about the water again. They were constantly grumbling about things. God gave them bread from heaven. He gave them manna. They called it “miserable food.” The Psalmist called it “angel’s food.” They called it “miserable food.” They had little appreciation for God’s grace. So they complained.

The two go together: grumbling and flirting with sin, testing God. And the results of that ingratitude are the problems that come and the consequences that come, the discipline that comes. It’s the result of not understanding grace and appreciating the greatness of God, appreciating who He is, His majesty, His glory. The result of focusing on self instead of fixing our minds on Him. And what we need is a vision of God. And I don’t mean some mystical experience. I mean a clear understanding of who He is, of His greatness, and what He has done for us. We need a vision of God.

Well, what I’m saying when I say that is we need to have an understanding of God’s doctrine, of the theology of the Word of God. We talk about theology. We talk

about doctrine. And I think sometimes – not here, necessarily, but with many people – their eyes glaze over and they think of some abstract teaching. No. We’re simply speaking about who God is, about His character, His attributes, and what He’s done, the great things that He’s done. We need that vision. We need to understand who he is. And that leads to a sense of gratitude, a sense of reverence that steers us away from a careless approach to life.

Well, that’s the list of Paul’s warnings from Israel’s history. He ends it with verse 10. Then in verse 11, he gives the significance of it. Again, he says, “these things happened as an example to us, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” We’re living in a very significant time. We have been since the beginning, since the day of Pentecost. It’s a time of fulfillment. That is a great blessing. The lessons of the past are all complete and we can learn from them. We can learn from all of history. There is a pattern to human behavior because human nature is the same in every generation. So we can learn from people’s mistakes, as well as from people’s wisdom. God is the same. He doesn’t change. God’s not capricious. He’s not arbitrary. He deals with people and He deals with nations according to His law, according to His righteous standard, which is inflexible.

So we can understand how He will act in the future by studying the past, how He’s going to act in the present by looking at history, how He’s dealt with people. But that is especially true of biblical history. It was recorded to instruct us. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the inspired writers of Scripture recorded the things that God wanted to preserve. Many things happened in Israel’s history that we have no knowledge of. They weren’t recorded. The Holy Spirit selected what He wanted us to know so that we would have the lessons we need to learn. All of these things were recorded for our benefit, so we need to study them. We need to learn from that. We need to take the warnings that the Lord gives us as well as the encouragements.

And this is not a passage about encouragements so much, but you read through the Word of God and you have it. We had special music this morning. It is a Word of praise from Psalm 23, and what do we hear there? “I shall not want.” Wherever God leads us, He goes before us. He goes behind us. He’s beside us. He “sets a table before us in the presence of our enemies.” He set a table for this nation out in the wilderness where there was nothing and He provided for them. Is it any different for us? Not at all. I don’t know

your circumstance, your situation. It may be dire. It may be difficult. You may be discouraged because you are experiencing life in the wilderness right now for one reason or another, in one way or another.

Perhaps you are without employment and you’re very discouraged, and understandably so. But look at Israel in the wilderness. God provided for them, and He was with them, and He will be with you. He is with you. These are the encouragements we have from the lessons of the Word of God from Israel’s history from the Old Testament. But of course here we’re looking at the warnings and the dangers and the dire circumstances that are red flags to us and instruct us. And that’s what Paul is focusing on here. He wants us to take heed of these things as we live in dangerous times in a dangerous world.

In verse 12, he has a special word of warning for the so-called strong who think that they know so much and are secure. That confidence, he says, is dangerous. “Therefore –” that is, in view of everything that I’ve said, Paul is saying. In view of Israel’s failure in spite of all of the nation’s blessings and privileges, in spite of all of that, he says, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” We’re always in danger of falling into sin and the misery that accompanies it, the ruin that it brings on us. No degree of progress can justify a lack of caution. No level of maturity can put us in a safe place.

Read through the Old Testament and what you’ll see is that it is the strong who stumble the worst. Abraham, the paramount man of faith, lost his confidence in God and in the promise, and he betrayed Sarah out of fear of Pharaoh. Betrayed his own wife. Moses, the humblest man on the earth was told to speak to the rock at Meribah. This is the second time. Instead, he struck the rock in anger, and it cost him the blessing of entering Canaan. Samson, the man of strength in his strength became morally weak and fell to a woman.

And then David, the man after God’s own heart, at the peak of his power and success neglected his duties. He became casual about things. It’s a good rule to consider this. Be where you’re supposed to be when you’re supposed to be there. It’s very simple. David didn’t. David was supposed to be out with his troops. When kings go out to war,

he stayed home. He was caught in a temptation, fell into sin with Bathsheba. You know the story.

We could go on and on and list such cases of that. Peter is another example. Confident that he wouldn’t deny the Lord, denied Him three times. So we need to take heed. Self-confidence is false security. That is a sobering warning. But Paul ends the passage in verse 13 with some strong encouragement. “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man.” You’re not going to face anything that is so unusual that you’re the only person that’s been there.

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” We face a lot of dangers in this world. It is a world that’s full of hidden traps and pitfalls, but no temptation is exceptional, something that foredooms us to failure. God doesn’t permit that. He is sovereign, and therefore He is in control of the circumstances of life. He knows our situations. He knows our capabilities. He knows our weaknesses. We can count on Him to help us. He is concerned and always faithful. He never tempts us to sin, but He does test our character with difficulties, though He never tests us beyond our strength and He always gives us a way out, a “way of escape.”

His providence is protective. He’s always with us, just as He was with Israel and just as He has providentially delivered every one of us from more temptation and more difficulties than we realize. Someday we are going to find out all of the pitfalls that we miraculously avoided without even knowing it. All of the dangers we faced that we were protected from, shielded from, that we never saw. All the temptations we escaped by God’s grace. God is providentially in control of us. He was providentially in control of those Corinthians. He’d placed them in a city full to temptation.

That was His providence. He put them there. They could count on Him not to expose them to anything beyond their ability to resist. That’s what Paul was saying. You can trust Him. Of course, if they were neglectful of God’s warnings and His instruction and they deliberately put themselves in harm’s way and they deliberately put themselves in the way of temptation, then a fall could be expected. That’s tempting the Lord, and unfortunately that happens because, as we’ve noted, sin is alluring. It is attractive. It

promises much to those who fall into it. It delivers nothing, though, but a trap. It is enslaving. It’s that bad.

In that legend of the labyrinth, there is a hero who escapes. He enters the maze with a ball of thread that he fastens to the entrance of the labyrinth and unwinds it as he goes. He then kills the monster and he’s able to easily follow the thread out, and he’s delivered. But we know it’s not that easy to get out of sin. That’s a labyrinth in which we can be trapped. We can’t rewind our lives. We can’t undo the problems. And, as I say, they become enslaving. But even in that, there is hope. There is a thread, so to speak. There is a provision of God, and that’s repentance. And as the sinning saint realizes his sin, like the prodigal son, and returns to the Lord, he, she is always received back. In fact, God can do a great work of restoration and make us useful to Him again, and He’ll do that. He’ll restore to us the years that the locust have eaten.

But how much better to escape the pain and the shame of sin altogether by avoiding temptation? The apostle’s counsel is to do that. It is never go into that labyrinth. Never put the Lord to the test. And always be looking for His way of escape in the temptation. It’s there. Take it. But there may be some here who are in a labyrinth of a different kind, the labyrinth of unbelief. You’re confused in the darkness and perhaps weighed down by some guilt. You’re wandering toward eternal destruction. You’re lost in all of that.

There is a way out. There is a way of deliverance. There is a deliverer, and it’s Jesus Christ, and our way out is through faith in Him. And so I invite you to look to Him, trust in Him, and He will bring you out of that and bring you into the light of day and bring you into a new life. And He does it through faith alone, simply looking to Him, trusting in Him, resting in Him. He’ll save your soul. He’ll save you immediately. He’ll save you forever and give you wisdom and guidance and blessing. So may God help you to look to Him, trust in Him, and be thankful for what He has done and will yet do for us. Let’s pray.

Father, we come to a text that’s full of warnings, full of warnings. Paul reviews the history of Your people in the wilderness and how it was failure after failure, disappointment after disappointment, hardship after hardship because they rebelled, and how prone we are to do that, how prone we are to wander. Keep us from doing that,

Father. Keep us in the path. You are our Good Shepherd. Lead us, and guide us, and strengthen us, and give us hearts that are grateful for what You’ve done and what you will yet do. Bless us, we pray, in Christ’s name, Amen.