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Too Many Blessings?

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

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Okay, how about we open this morning with a quiz? True /False: The more I have, the better I live. True /False: The more we have, the better we live. Now I'm guessing people out in the culture immediately would say, "True" because that's by and large the value system most people embrace. But this, of course, is a much more sophisticated audience. So you are asking the question: The more of what? More money? More stuff? More pleasure? More fishing? More what? Okay, here it is: "The more of God's blessing we have, the better we live." "Oh, that's what you meant! Well, then that's easy. Of course that's true...Isn't it?"

Our text this morning reminds us that, sadly, that isn't necessarily true. As a matter of fact we could make the case that the generation that experienced more of God's obvious blessing than any other generation in history completely lost their way. If you have a Bible this morning, turn with us to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 10. Next week is the weekend of the 50th anniversary for our church and next week is really all about celebration! It's celebrating God's faithfulness and what we've had a chance to be a part of. But before we do that, I thought it would be helpful this week to just remind ourselves of a few important things.

Paul's talking to the Corinthians in Chapter 9 and, starting in verse 24, he's talking about: if you're going to run a race, run in such a way that you might win. Now I've mentioned this before; I'm a very competitive person and, for much of my life, I thought that was a character defect. I remember vividly the first time I finally understood this passage in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 9. When I read the words, "If you're going to run a race, run in such a way that you might win," I thought: Now that's a value system that makes sense to me. I don't get running a race if you aren't running to win. What's the point? And I realized being competitive isn't necessarily a character defect; I just need to learn to channel that energy into the things that ultimately matter—and that was very helpful to me. Paul talks about running in such a way that you might win in reference to the Christian life. If you're going to run this race, then run to win. Why else would you run? But his concern is: it's possible that, after expending all this energy running the race, we might actually get to the finish line and find out we had disqualified ourselves. He says, "If you're going to run a race, you have to run according to the rules." That, then, launches the discussion of Chapter 10. How do we avoid running the race, only to find that we have disqualified ourselves somewhere along the way? Verse 1:

> **For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, (*NASB 1 Cor. 10:1a)**

Some of the translations say, "I don't want you to be *ignorant*." That's a very good translation. There's something we need to know; we shouldn't be ignorant. We need to be aware and, the bottom line is, we need to be aware that the blessings of God don't guarantee faithfulness on our part. We could very well run the race but run miles off course. He says:

> **...that our fathers were all under the cloud,** (Vs. 1b)

Now in a couple of verses he's going to talk about the blessings that a particular generation experienced. **Our fathers** is referring to the Hebrew people in days gone by—the people of God, a

particular generation. When he talks about ...**under the cloud**...he's talking about divine guidance. When God led the Hebrew people out of bondage in Egypt to the Land of Promise, He didn't just give them a treasure map and a compass and say, "Good luck; hope you find it!" He actually gave them divine guidance, far better than a GPS. By day He gave them a pillar of cloud; by night He gave them a pillar of fire—literally a pillar from heaven that led them through the wilderness all the way to the Land of Promise—tremendous intervention and guidance from God! He says:

> **...and all passed through the sea;** (Vs. 1c)

That's a reference to the parting of the Red Sea, one of the amazing miracles of the Old Testament. The Hebrew people were on the banks of the sea; Pharaoh was closing in with his army; all seemed a loss; and God miraculously parts the sea and they go across on dry land. Divine deliverance! Now sometimes when you see this reenacted in the movies, it looks like a dozen people crossing the Platte River. That wasn't the way it was at all. It was well over 3 million people. If you wanted to put one hundred people shoulder to shoulder across, the line would have been over fifty miles long, crossing a massive sea that had the walls of water stand up so they could go across. This miracle was so dramatic that when we read the story of Rahab in Judges, Chapter 2, and she's talking with the spies, she actually says to them that, "We have all heard the story of what your God did when He parted the Red Sea and we are all terrified of the Hebrew God!" Word of what God had done got out. It was an amazing miracle. It says:

> **...and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;** (Vs. 2)

The word **baptized** means to be identified with and all that's saying is that these people knew: This wasn't just some thing that happened and they were eye witnesses. This was actually *for them* as the people of God. They were identified with Moses as their leader and they knew this was God *guiding us*. This was God *delivering us*. This was for us *as the people of God*. That's what he means there.

> **...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.** (Vs. 3-4)

God miraculously provided water for them out of a rock. God miraculously provided food for them, literally out of the heavens. They always had enough water; they always had enough food. And then Paul reminds us: This was a picture of the greater reality to come and that would be Christ who would be their food and their water. This generation arguably experienced more divine intervention from God than any other generation in the history of the world! Imagine what it would be like that God Himself, with this pillar, was leading you every step of the way; that God had divinely delivered you from Pharaoh and his army; that God provided water; God provided food along with many other ways that God revealed Himself to these people. If there was ever a generation of people that should have clearly understood what it means to follow after God, what it means to be faithful, it should have been this generation. But the very next word is: **nevertheless**. Oh, oh, we can see it coming.

> **Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.** (Vs. 5)

I always have to smile a little when I read that verse because it says, **nevertheless with most of them**—*all of them except two*! Out of three or four million people that experienced this divine

intervention in so many significant ways—think of this—there were two out of that generation that God allowed to enter into the Land of Promise: Joshua and Caleb. The rest of them died in the wilderness because God was displeased with them, because of the choices they made. That is absolutely staggering! How could millions of people experience that level of God's blessing and, out of millions, only two of them trusted God to enter the land? You say, "Okay, why is Paul telling us this?" Verse 6:

> **Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things, as they also craved.**

So we don't have to guess as to Paul's intent. The intent is that we might learn from their example, that we wouldn't make the same mistakes they made. So what were those mistakes? Verse 7:

> **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"**

This is the story from Exodus, Chapter 32. Moses goes up on Mount Sinai. He's encountering God and receiving the Law. The people are waiting at the base of the mountain and they begin to wonder if Moses is coming back. Even though they had physically left Egypt—and Egypt in the Old Testament is symbolic of the world and the world's value system—Egypt was still in their heart. And this journey from bondage to the Land of Freedom was getting kind of hard and Moses was up the mountain and, "Maybe he's not coming back," and so they decided, "Let's recreate Egypt here." And so they pulled their gold together and they created a golden calf. They became their own gods; they created their own god; they worshiped their own god and they engaged in the behavior that had defined life in Egypt. And you remember the story: Moses comes down and it's a disastrous situation. If God had so obviously made His presence known with such a clear promise that He would get them to the Land of Promise—the land flowing with milk and honey—why would they possibly choose to create and worship their own god? Verse 8:

> **...Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.**

What he's talking about there is primarily sexual immorality. You can find the story in Numbers, Chapter 25. The Hebrew people, after all that God had done for them, had engaged themselves in gross immorality. They were neck-deep in idolatry. They had adopted the pagan ways of the nations around them and they were engaged in all kinds of sexual behavior. And with each passing day it became more and more blatant, more obvious. They were *sticking it* to Moses and they were *sticking it* to God until, finally, one Hebrew man in broad daylight brought a Moabite prostitute right into the very middle of the camp—right under Moses' nose, right in the face of God—and wandered into his tent in broad daylight to have relations with his pagan prostitute. There was a Hebrew priest that simply could not take it any longer. He grabbed a spear, went into the tent and the text says that: the couple was engaged in sexual behavior and he rammed the spear through them both and pinned them to the floor of the tent and killed them both, which unleashed the judgment of God and **twenty-three thousand people** that day were judged dead because of their gross immorality.

Now when we read passages like that, we're shocked! But frankly we are shocked at the wrong thing. We're shocked that God would actually hold people accountable for their immoral choices as they're sticking it in the face of God. How could God have the audacity to hold somebody accountable? People should be free to stick it to God with no consequences. What we should be

shocked at is: How could these people do that after God, in such a loving fashion, had led them every step of the way? He led them; He provided for them; He guided them; He protected them; He took care of them—He did everything for them! And, in return, they stick it to Him with every immoral thing they could think of. That's what's shocking! How could people do that to a God who had so loved them and cared for them? Verse 9:

> **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.** (Vs. 9-10)

That's talking about two different incidences. You find them in the book of Numbers, Chapter 16 and Chapter 21 but both of them have the same basic thing in common—and that is they were *grumblers*. They were just continually grumbling and complaining about everything. This is perhaps the most dismissed sin of the Bible. It's interesting how much of the Old Testament and the New Testament talks about how God feels about grumbling and yet it's one of those things that we just summarily dismiss. No big deal. No grumbler thinks he or she is a grumbler but everybody around them knows, and they get tired of it.

How much blessing is enough? Over and over and over and over God blessed these people but: if God blessed me yesterday, then expect a blessing today and, if I don't get a blessing today, I grumble. "It's not fair," and, "I don't want the same blessing. I want more blessing and I want more and I want more." That's the story of this generation of Hebrew people. God just kept blessing them more and more and more, yet the grumbling never stopped. It created a spirit of entitlement. "We deserve more," and God finally got it up to here with all the grumbling and He took them out. You say, "Why is he telling us all this?" Verse 11:

> **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 (**in light of this) **let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.** (Vs. 11-12**)**

We don't have to guess why Paul is telling us this story: in order that we might not make the same mistakes, that the blessings of God would be received and appreciated and result in the worship of His people, not His people drifting off course. The text says "*If you think it won't happen to you, take heed; I'm going to put you at the top of the list of those most likely to lose their way.*" Whenever we talk about the Pharisees in the Gospels—those religious, legalistic hypocrites—we always find ourselves describing someone other than ourselves. Whenever we talk about the Hebrew people in some of these great Old Testament stories, we find ourselves thinking, "What's wrong with those people? I mean, they must be loony. Who could ever have that much of God, that much blessing of God, that much evidence of God and act like that? I would never do that." And that's exactly what Paul is saying. If you don't think it could happen to you, take heed. You are at the top of the list of those most likely to drift away. The fact is: it can happen to any of us.

Just because we celebrate fifty years of God's faithfulness and fifty years of the faithfulness of God's people doesn't mean we have a guarantee of tomorrow. Churches have their seasons. They come and they go and they disappear. There's no reason to believe that that could not happen to us. Fifty years from now this could be a lovely shopping mall if we presume upon the blessing of God and somehow lose our way. Verse 13:

> **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.

Very familiar words! In this particular context, the temptation is to presume upon the blessing of God and, in the process, to crave evil things, to lose our way and to be guilty of the same sins that the Hebrew generation was guilty of. Now when I read that verse, I find it both comforting and sobering. Comforting from the sense of knowing: I will never in the history of my Christian life ever face anything too hard for me. I will never face a temptation too strong for me. In every circumstance God has promised He will always make a way of escape. There's great comfort in that.

But it's also a very sobering reality when we live in a culture of excuses, in a culture of blame, in a culture of rationalizations, in a culture of, "It's not my fault," because what the text is saying is, "There are no legitimate excuses in God's eyes." You can't just blame your past. You can't just blame your circumstances. You can't just blame this and blame that and rationalize and excuse and figure out why, in your case, it wasn't your fault, because what the text is saying is: In every single test and temptation God gave you a way out and God gave you what you needed to say, "No," to that temptation every single time. So there's a sobering reality: That I own the fact that, when I give in, that it is my fault and I confess that before God.

So what does this have to do with us? Again, there is no reason to believe that just because the people have been faithful in the past, that we will continue to be faithful in the future. That doesn't just automatically happen. Just because God has blessed us over the years doesn't mean everybody in turn will live rightly. There are many buildings around the country that once housed thriving churches and today they're museums to the memories of what once was. So how do we think about this? Let's just go back through the three big areas that Paul identified.

First of all is the area of *idolatry*—that after all God had done for them, they chose to be their own gods and to create their own god and to worship their own god. I find it somewhat ironic that it was called the *golden calf* because certainly, as Americans, we would say that is our number one point of idolatry. We have taken God's remarkable blessings on this country and we've become selfish and greedy and our idol is the golden calf. Most Americans will worship that god, will live for that god, will die for that god—that god will define their story. And, on this Memorial weekend, I would ask you the question, "Do you think hundreds of thousands of men and women gave up their lives and died so we could become a selfish, greedy country? Wouldn't it be true that they had a higher vision for what we were to become as a people?" I would suggest to you that the biggest chance of this country destroying itself is on the basis of its greed and selfishness. Whether we can turn this ship around or not remains to be seen.

But what about us, as the people of God, who've experienced so much blessing from God? What has defined the people of this church for fifty years has been sacrifice! It has been people who have been willing to say, "No," to the golden calf. "That's not going to define my life; that's not the god I'm going to worship." It's easy to just take everything for granted and forget that so many people sacrificed so much for so many years, so that we could have what we so take for granted every week here. That's what you're going to hear next week: the journey from downtown to 11th and M, to 17th and A, to out here, is defined by people who sacrificed time; they sacrificed money; they sacrificed emotion; they sacrificed blood and sweat in order to lay it down, to say, "No," to the golden calf. "I want to invest my life in something that lasts forever."

When people ask me: what do I love most about Lincoln Berean Church? I always answer the question the same way without hesitation. The answer is, "Its people. For fifty years God has brought the most remarkable people through these doors, people who have been willing to sacrifice, people willing to lay it down, people willing to give it up for the sake of that which lasts forever." Many, many, many of you in this auditorium this morning are people who have done that. You've laid it down; you've sacrificed; you've made significant life choices to invest what God has given you in the things that ultimately matter—and that is what has defined this journey. The question is: Will the next generation say, "No," to worshiping the golden calf and be willing to sacrifice, be willing to lay it down, be willing to invest in that which lasts forever?

Second of all is the area of *immorality*. Specifically the text was talking about sexual immorality. Without question this current generation of our country is the most sexually contaminated generation in the history of our country. What our children are growing up with is staggering in terms of the sexual exploitation of our world. But it isn't just limited to that. It's immorality! It's choosing whether we're going to walk uprightly with integrity and follow God's way, or whether we're going to choose to be our own gods and live our lives our own way.

Part of what has defined the story for fifty years has been people who are serious about their sin. We have reminded ourselves often that we are *a gathering of sinners and misfits and losers* who have been made right by the blood of Jesus. We're not self-righteous people. We're people who have been made right by Jesus. But what has defined the story for fifty years is people who really are serious about sin, people who surrender to the authority of the Scripture, people who say, "God defines right and wrong," and people who haven't just assimilated into the latest current of the culture, but rather people who have been willing to stand up and live lives that are pleasing to God. That's been part of the story and, for God to continue to bless his people, it must be part of the story to come. You can't expect God to continue to bless His bride when His bride is playing the harlot. The bride must choose to be faithful and to walk uprightly with integrity and with dignity and be a light in the midst of the darkness. So the question we ask of this generation and the generations to come is, "Will we be serious about sin? Will we take our stand for what's right and wrong?"

Thirdly is this area of *grumbling*. We don't need that—let's close in prayer. (laughter) Again, it's one of the most dismissed sins in the Bible. Nobody sees himself or herself as a grumbler. Trust me; the people around you may not share your opinion. Grumbling is a problem. Clearly God is offended when over and over and over again He blesses His people with unimaginable blessing and they just keep complaining; they just keep grumbling. If God blesses me yesterday, I expect a blessing today and, if I don't get my blessing today, I grumble about it. And I don't want yesterday's blessing; I want a better blessing. And it creates a spirit of entitlement. We start to think we actually *deserve* more grace. Now think of that statement. It's nonsensical. Grace is an undeserved favor. Yet we get so mixed up we actually think we deserve more grace and, if we don't get it, we grumble. And God's in His heaven saying, "When will you people be satisfied? When is enough, enough? When will you just love Me and appreciate with a heart of thanksgiving so much that I've given you?"

Grumblers have the heart of a consumer. It's an insatiable appetite; enough is never enough. No matter what God does, it's never going to be enough. It's just more grumbling. Grumblers have been given far too much and have earned far too little. Grumblers are convinced that this is all for me. For fifty years generations have laid it down. They've bled; they've sweat; they've sacrificed; they've given up vacations; they've lived moderate lifestyles; they've done it all for me so that I could be really comfortable today. That's the way a grumbler thinks.

Contrary to that is a heart of thanksgiving, a heart that understands what has been given and, rather than the heart of a consumer, it's the heart of a steward: that the generations before me haven't sacrificed so that I can consume this on myself, but that I might steward it. I have the responsibility to steward what I've been given for the greater purposes of God and His kingdom. It's a sobering responsibility to be given so much. It's very easy to just walk through these doors and take everything for granted and complain about the most ridiculous things and fail to realize how much we have to be thankful for and to realize it is the responsibility of this generation to steward what we've been given for the greater purposes of God and His kingdom.

How this next generation and, by the way, that is us, responds in these three areas will determine whether or not fifty years from now this will be a thriving church or a lovely shopping mall. Just because God has blessed us in the past is no guarantee that He will bless us in the future if we do not continue to seek to be the faithful people of God. My prayer for us, as this generation, is that we will be as faithful as the generations who have gone before us.

Our Father, we are thankful that You are a faithful God. Lord, Your Word is clear. You don't just pour out blessings regardless of how we live our lives. Lord, You want a relationship with us. You want us to love You and to pursue You and to enjoy You and celebrate You. And, Lord, to do that we need to walk in Your ways so that we have freedom to experience intimacy with You. Lord, we're thankful this morning for the generations that have gone before us. Lord, these have been remarkable people. They have sacrificed a lot for us to have what we have. Lord, may we as this generation and the generations to come steward what we've been given for Your eternal purposes. In Jesus' Name. Amen

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