



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 3, 2013

3rd Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Numbers 16:23-40](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 38](#)

Second Lesson: [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 13:1-9](#)

Stand Firm in the Lord

Learn From the Past

Lean on the Lord

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Last week we looked at some of Paul's writings to the Philippians. We saw his encouragement to stand firm in the Lord by following the right examples. He pointed to himself and those that cling to the Lord, and spending time knowing God, and keeping our focus on God, and being eager for God to return.

This week we go to a different book. We go to Corinthians. But we still hear our God speak to us through Paul about standing firm in the Lord. This time he uses negative examples. He says to learn also from the example of those that didn't stand firm in the Lord, who thought they were standing firm and ended up losing everything. This morning he tells us to stand firm in the Lord and to learn from these negative examples as well, and as we face the same things they faced, to lean on our God.

Paul points out to the Corinthians, who had all kinds of problems, that the struggle as we strive to live for God and not for ourselves is a timeless one. He addresses all the problems they were facing. Jealousy, envy, strife, clicks, we are better than you are, and all this other garbage that often creeps up in the life of Christians. He says it's the same things that were faced by God's people a long, long time ago.

Some 1,500 years earlier, God had blessed his people greatly and led them out of slavery in Egypt. They had been slaves in a land not their own for 450 years. God had led them out and said, "I'm going to take you back to the Promised Land. I don't care what those people living in the Promised Land look like, I am going to make sure you conquer. I am going to give it to you." To give them all assurance that God could do anything, right after they had left Egypt when the Egyptians decided, "Hey! We want our slaves back," and Pharaoh came with his armies, his chariots, God parted the Red Sea. Paul speaks of that as "They were baptized in the sea." They passed through the sea on dry ground and saw the walls on each side of them and saw how powerful their God was and how their God was acting to deliver them from the threats of this world. They were baptized into that he says. They saw the example that God would take care of them. They were baptized into the cloud. The cloud led them by day and the pillar of fire by night. Jesus himself was with them, the pre-incarnate Son of God. He was there.

They had every advantage, just like the Corinthians had every advantage of knowing the fulfillment of the ages, just as you and I have the privilege of knowing the fulfillment of the ages, that the Christ who led them is the Christ who came and lived and died to take away our sins. We've seen what he has done. They had that same spiritual food to eat and to drink, which is Christ, that we have, but man, did they mess it up.

When they left Egypt, we are told there were 600,000 men, not counting women or children. That's what it said. Do you remember how many got to go into the Promised Land? Anybody? Anybody at all? If you want a hint, count your hands. Caleb and Joshua. Everyone else died in the desert. So when it says, "God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert," yes, they were.

They had every advantage, yet time and again they gave into the temptations that I don't think are a lot different than what you and I face. Did you see the four temptations that were listed there in that second paragraph? Do not be idolaters. Don't fear, love or trust anything more than God. Moses was up on the mountain too long at Sinai, so the people had Aaron build a golden calf. It says that the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry. Moses was taking too long, so they decided to have their own party with their own god, and they said "Here is the god that brought us out of Egypt." God was not happy. In fact, the Levites took their spears and ran through the people that had done this and killed a great number of them. They had seen what God had done at the Red Sea, and not too long after they said, "We know better. We are going to make our own god."

We have that same temptation today to make our own god. God doesn't act fast enough for us, so then we get mad at God and blame God and we put our trust or our love in other things or other people more than we do our God. God has laid before us all kinds of things that he wants us to do, but we quite often follow what's always been done and don't even know what God actually says. We do that constantly as Christians. We do it constantly as a Christian congregation.

We talked about it a little bit this morning at Bible Study. There are people that get all uptight, all upset because the Constitution wasn't followed. Yet God has said to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God has said, "You will be my witnesses. You tell people that are going to hell how I have won heaven for them." We skip that all the time and we don't seem to be too worried about it.

Why? Because we've made our own god of what we like and what we want and what we desire. Even good and godly people that are always in worship can fall prey to the idol of what I like. Which is better, more people hearing the Gospel, or less people hearing the Gospel but it's done in a way that I like? To me it's obvious. God says more people hearing the Gospel. Time and again I'm told, "No it's better to do it in the way I like and have less people hear the Gospel." We make our own idols. We aren't a whole lot different than these folks.

It says we should not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and one day 23,000 of them died. I believe that's in Numbers 25 if I remember correctly. They were by Peor before they entered the Promised Land. The god of Peor was Baal. The Israelites crossed the river because they went to worship the god Baal. Why did they go to worship the god Baal? Baal didn't bring them out of Egypt. They went there because how they worshiped the god Baal was to go and find the temple prostitutes and have sex with them. So that's what they did. God had told them, "Don't do that," but they went and did it. In fact, when God through Moses was calling out the people and saying "Put to death everyone who went to worship Baal," another Israelite guy came walking through the middle of the camp with a temple prostitute and took her back to his own tent. One of Aaron's sons grabbed a spear, followed them, and ran the spear through both of them and pinned them to the ground. We are told between 23,000 and 24,000 of them died that day because God said, "I take my command to use sex properly seriously."

The temptation of sexual sin isn't all that unique to 1500 BC is it? Sexual sin surrounds us all the time yet today. In fact, we've become so desensitized to it that we don't even speak of it as sin anymore. We speak of it as choices. We speak of it as being natural. God really is warning us to say, "I hate sexual sin just as much as I hate all other sins. Don't just think I go by majority vote as to what I like and I don't like." God acts independent of us and he has absolutes. When we see these warnings of Israel's past, he's saying to us today, "Learn from them. Recognize sin."

It says we shouldn't test the Lord as some of them did and were killed by snakes, the poisonous serpents that came and bit all the people because they put the Lord to the test in his leadership.

Then it says, "Do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel." That's Numbers 16, our First Lesson. Korah, Dathan and Abiram had said, "Hey, how come only Aaron and his sons can offer incense before the Lord? We're just as good as they are. We are going to offer incense before the Lord." God told them, "No. That's not how you worship me. Only Aaron and his sons are supposed to." What happened in what I read in the First Lesson when they did it was God's answer. He said, "Don't worship me the way you want to. Worship the way I said you are to worship me."

Then we are told the next day, this wasn't in our reading, the next day the people complained that Moses had put those people to death, that somehow Moses made the earth open and then close and it killed those people. They said, "Moses, it's your fault. You killed good people!" We are told that 14,700 of them were put to death by the Lord's angel, the destroying angel as it talks about in what I read to you.

Grumbling against God's appointed leaders...does that ever happen today? Grumbling against those gifts God has given to his church...does that ever happen today? I've studied the history of this congregation and it seems to be how we, as a congregation,

at times think God is best served, by making one of the Called Workers the target of all the problems in the congregation and then seeking to fix it somehow.

Do these warnings about grumbling, testing God, sexual sins, and loving something else more than God speak to us? Yes. You bet! They hit us right where each and every one of us live. They encompass us. Each and every one of us has done these things at one time or another. So our God is pleading with us today that we don't get so self confident that you think you aren't able to fall into sin, that you think you are somehow more pious and better than everyone else. Realize that we are all, at our core, sinners who are capable of any sin.

When we recognize what we are capable of, and we recognize what we have done, and we see that our Lord hates it, then instead of making excuses for it, we say, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." And our God does have mercy on us. When we are tempted, God says he is faithful and he will provide a way out. His faithfulness centers in Jesus Christ. Jesus lived and died for everyone of these sins that those people committed, everyone of the sins you and I have committed in these ways, and he took them all away through Jesus' life and death. Nothing we have done has paid for anyone of our sins. When we remember that, then we won't get high and mighty and look down on people that fall into sin, because maybe we'd think, "I wouldn't commit this one," and then we look down on someone that does and think, "How terrible that they do that." Get over yourself. We are all capable of any sin.

What God wants us to be is repentant of our own sins and loving of those who are caught in sin and reaching out with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to lead them to forgiveness. He warns us so that we take it seriously. He doesn't tell us to look inside of yourself to find the answer to sin. He says "Look to me to find the answer to sin because that answer is certain and absolute as well." God's Law is absolute, but so is God's Gospel.

This is the very nature of grace, something I don't think we always understand. We talked about it last Sunday at our Book Study. I thought it was one of the most amazing insights that Professor Jeske has in this book (*Connecting Sinai to Calvary: A Guide to the Old Testament*). He said this is grace...and for us it's really unnatural. We talked about that for awhile. But this is grace...God's love for us is so perfect that there is **nothing** that you and I can do that will make him love us less. Think about that for a minute.

It's unnatural in this sense...think of all the people that you love. Is there anything they could do so that you would love them less? Yes. It happens all the time, doesn't it? Is there anything you could do so that the people who love you would love you less? Yes. It happens all the time, doesn't it? It will never happen with God. Can you wrap your head around that?

That's why God says, "When you hear these warnings, look at yourself." Don't look at your neighbor and say, "Boy, you really should be listening to that. That's you." He

wants you to look at yourself and then see your sin. But he also desperately wants you to look at your Savior and see your forgiveness and lean on that Savior as you go forward, to live for God more and more day after day, not out of fear of judgment, but out of rejoicing that Christ has already been judged in your place. That's how you stand firm in the Lord. Amen.