

032019 "Wilderness Temptations"
1 Corinthians 10:1-13 "Lord, I'm Tempted" Series
Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

This is the second week of our sermon series on temptation. Just to be clear, what's a temptation? A temptation is anything that pulls us, or pushes us, to sin. Anything that entices us, or pressures us, to sin is a temptation.

We can be tempted to sin by things like alcohol, drugs, sex, food, porn, money; by stealing, lying, gossiping, cheating, bullying. We can be tempted to sin by peer pressure, by social media acceptance, by wanting to become "famous." And we can be tempted to sin by resisting authority, ignoring people in need, skipping church, not taking God seriously, and by so many more things. Temptations to sin are all around us.

We need help. I need help. You need help. And tonight God has something important to say about our temptations. First, he gives us an urgent warning about temptations. And, second, God gives us some awesome encouragement about our temptations.

First, the urgent warning. "Your temptations are deadly serious," God tells us tonight. Our Epistle Lesson reminds us of a super-important story in the Bible. It's the story of how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land; but how the people gave in to temptations, and suffered horrible consequences.

Take your pen, and circle four words with me in verses 1-4. God provided four incredible blessings to the Israelites out there in the wilderness. First, it says in verse 2, "our fathers were all under the cloud." Circle the word "cloud." Remember how God led them through the wilderness by a

pillar of cloud? The cloud was a daily visible reminder of God's presence and protection.

Next, the word "sea." They "all passed through the sea." Remember how God parted the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites escaped the Egyptian army?

Now, in verse 3, circle "food." They "all ate the same spiritual food." That was the manna, a bread from heaven that God provided every morning for forty years.

And one more word to circle, in verse 4. "Drink." "All drank the same spiritual drink." When the Israelites ran out of water in the wilderness, God made water gush out of rock.

So God provided these miraculous blessings in the wilderness. But the Israelites were ungrateful. They were impatient. Just like us, they were tempted to sin, tempted to ignore God. So circle four more words with me.

Verse 7. "Do not be idolaters as some of them were." Circle the word "idolaters." Traveling out in the hot, dusty wilderness, they people said, "We want a god we can see." So they made a golden statue of a calf, and they sinned by worshipping their false idol, instead of worshipping their true God.

Our next word is in verse 8. "Immorality." "We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did." The people had a huge party, worshipped their golden calf, and then got caught up in a sexual frenzy. They were tempted to sin, but then punished for their immorality. 23,000 died in a single day.

Next, verse 9, another temptation. Circle "test." "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did." The Israelites kept testing God, demanding miracles, complaining about everything. Trusting God was hard. Temptation got the best of them; and, again, there was severe punishment.

And one more word to circle, verse 10: “grumble.” Everybody grumble for a moment ... The Israelites grumbled against God. “Why did he lead us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?” they whined sinfully, not really trusting their Savior at all.

Those were the wilderness temptations that the Israelites faced. And God is warning us tonight. “Your temptations are deadly serious, too,” he wants us to know. We read about the punishments for the sins of Israel, when they fell to temptation. But God is warning us, too.

Read verse 12 with me. “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” And then read the next sentence in verse 13. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.” Is God just talking to his people long ago? Or is he talking to you and me, too? When we give in to temptation, when we sin, we deserve exactly what the Israelites got. God’s punishment. God’s wrath. God’s anger.

And God is warning us all tonight. He’s holding us accountable. “Your temptations are deadly serious,” he says. An urgent warning.

But then comes the powerful encouragement. Here’s what else we Christians have to know about the temptations we face. Read the next sentence in verse 13, up to the second comma. “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.” Boy, is that a relief! God promises us that there’s a limit to the temptations we’ll face. Underline those words with me. And remember these words. Because we can always rely on this promise.

We are tempted to sin every day, every hour. But the Word of God teaches us tonight that world out there doesn’t have complete power over us, and sin doesn’t have the final say, but God does. Read those words with me again: “God is

faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.”

That is so encouraging! But there’s more. Read the rest of verse 13, and underline as you go. “But with temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” God doesn’t send temptations your way; but he promises you here that he’ll always provide an escape hatch, a way out, when you are tempted.

When we rely on his strength, rather than our own, we have a chance against temptation. When we ask for his help, he’ll answer our prayer. When we yield, in our moments of temptation, to the power of God’s Holy Spirit living and working in us, instead of just trying to resist temptation on our own, we can endure. That’s God’s promise. “With temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

These are tremendously encouraging words, aren’t they? We need to take God’s warning seriously, and remember that the temptations we battle are deadly serious. But we can also be strongly encouraged tonight. God says there’s a limit to our temptations, and there’s always a way out in the fight against temptation. Remember that, too.

And remember one thing more. We may not always win every battle in the war against temptation and sin. I surely don’t. But Jesus did. We’re all going to fail sometimes, and sin is always going to be a part of our lives, on this side of eternity. But that’s why we gather around the cross of Christ. Jesus died there to forgive our sin. He took all the wrath and anger of God on himself, and paid its penalty in full. So we throw ourselves on the mercy of God again tonight, on the compassionate love of Christ. We pray, “Lord, I’m tempted. I need your help. I need your forgiveness. Without you, I am lost.” And, thank God, he hears. He answers. He helps. He forgives.

In all your temptations – in every one – turn to Christ. Amen.