

The Jealousy of God **1 Corinthians 10:1-22**

My family just enjoyed watching the Olympics a few weeks ago and it was especially fun because we had our very own Alicia Munson from Amery running in the 10K. (Picture) She ended up placing 13th which was an amazing accomplishment for someone from Amery, WI. The Olympics are so enjoyable to watch because you get to see the world's greatest athletes compete against each other.

But not all the greatest athletes make it. (Picture) This year one of the big headlines leading up to the Olympics was about a sensational sprinter from Louisiana State University, Sha'Carri Richardson who had broken the 100m record as a freshman in 2019. She won the Olympic trials this spring and was poised to go to Tokyo when her Olympic dreams were cut short. She was suspended from the U.S. team because she tested positive for Marijuana. It was big news. The fastest U.S. female sprinter – disqualified, and unable to compete.

It reminded me of another famous scandal. (Picture) I never got into cycling, but I was always impressed with Lance Armstrong who seemed bullet proof in the cycling world. He won the Tour de France seven years in a row, and what made it even more impressive was that he was a cancer survivor. It was like he couldn't be beaten. But it was then discovered that he was using performance enhancing drugs, so he was disqualified – stripped of his 7 titles and his honor along with it.

We have been studying the book of 1 Corinthians and at the end of chapter 9, which we looked at last week, Paul makes somewhat of a stunning statement. After comparing the Christian life to a race with an eternal prize at the end, he says: *"But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."* What? The Apostle Paul being disqualified? Who would ever think of such a thing?

Well, apparently Paul did. According to him that's why he "disciplined his body to keep it under control," or the way some translations put it: "beat his body and made it his slave." Paul didn't want to be a Lance Armstrong – he didn't want to preach to others and then be disqualified from receiving the eternal reward. Apparently there was some way he believed he could be disqualified.

Did that mean he thought he could lose his salvation? Or that he worried about a terrible surprise in the end? That would sure be troubling! And that's the way some people think about disqualification. But I don't think Paul had that in mind based on other things he wrote. Paul taught that if a person is truly born again of the Spirit, nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus or keep Christ from completing the good work he's begun. So I don't think he thought he could lose his salvation. He also wrote about the assurance he had of being with Christ and receiving his eternal reward. So I don't think he worried about a terrible surprise in the end.

A runner can end up being disqualified without knowing until the end, but in most cases, they know they've done something worth disqualification. Sha'Carri Richardson knew she was doing something that would disqualify her. Lance Armstrong knew as well. And I think it's something like that, that Paul had in mind. He didn't think he might lose his salvation or get a terrible surprise in the end, but he also didn't presume he was saved regardless of how he lived his life. He knew that how he lived his life mattered. Obedience to Christ mattered. It wouldn't save him, but it would be evidence of his salvation. And if he gave up on that and went a different way, he knew he'd be disqualified. And Paul didn't want that to happen.

He didn't want that to happen to the people he preached to either, and when it came to the people in the church at Corinth, he saw something that was concerning to him – something that could end in disqualification that he needed to warn them about so they would flee from it. This morning I want us to see what that was and see if there's anything similar in our lives that we too need to flee from.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-5.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Paul has them think about the history of God's people back at the time of the Exodus when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. He describes it in such a way

that they could see similarities between them and the Israelites. Some of the blessings they experienced by being part of the church in Corinth were similar to the blessings the Israelites experienced in the Exodus.

The Israelites were all under the cloud, which points to God's presence and guidance. They all passed through the sea, which had to do with God's protection and deliverance. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and the sea, which means they received God's blessings by virtue of their association with Moses as their head. And they all ate the same spiritual food and drink, which points to God's provision of manna and water from the rock in the wilderness and more significantly to the presence of Christ with them.

The Corinthians experienced similar blessings by being part of the church. They experienced God's presence and guidance, his protection and deliverance. They had been blessed by being baptized into Christ who was the Head of the Church. And they experienced the presence and provision of Christ by participating in Communion.

So both the people of Israel and the people of the church in Corinth had experienced many blessings from God. But then Paul begins his warning by pointing out what happened to most of the Israelites: *"Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."* Even though they experienced many blessings from God, God was not pleased with most of them, and they perished in the wilderness under God's judgment. They were disqualified and Paul wanted the people of Corinth to be aware of a fatal flaw in the Israelites that was also a potential problem for them. He describes it in the next few verses.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-10

⁶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

The fatal flaw in the Israelites was that even though they had been led by God out of Egypt, they didn't renounce their former life of idol worship along with its evil practices. They hung on to it and kept going back to it. Paul lists 4 of the many examples of when they did this and were destroyed in the wilderness.

One was right away at Mt. Sinai when Moses went up on the mountain to meet with God and didn't come down for several weeks (Ex. 32). The people assumed he was dead and proceeded to fashion and worship a golden idol with feasting, drinking, and dancing, which likely progressed into sexual immorality. 3,000 were killed because of it. The second was in the wilderness where the people turned to sexual immorality with the Moabites and began to worship their idols. In that case over 23,000 died from a plague and execution. The third was when the Israelites put Christ to the test by complaining about food and wishing they were back in Egypt. God sent poisonous snakes among them that killed many. The fourth was when they grumbled and longed for Egypt – which happened often – but Paul probably had Korah's rebellion in mind when the ground opened up underneath them and swallowed a large group of people.

They belonged to the covenant community and had received many blessings from God because of it, but because of their ongoing evil ways rooted in idolatry, God's judgment came upon them and they were disqualified. And Paul wanted the Corinthians to take care that the same thing didn't happen to them. Paul says what happened to Israel was to be an example for them so that they wouldn't desire evil as the Israelites did.

As we've seen earlier in this sermon series, one of the very real problems for the Christians in Corinth was the prevalence of idolatry in their society. It had a central place in family traditions, social interactions, and personal backgrounds. That's why things like sexual immorality and temple prostitutes were an issue in the church along with attending idol feasts and eating meat sacrificed to idols. Those were a regular part of their lives because of idol worship in the culture. And it would be hard for Christians to break free from those things because that would also mean breaking away from long-held family traditions and social gatherings. They would be veering away from what was considered normal in society.

So it would be easy to keep doing them for convenience and tradition. But Paul saw a major problem with that based on the example of the Israelites. By flirting

with idolatry they were standing on very dangerous ground – ground that could be worthy of disqualification. So he gives them this warning. He continues in verse 11...

Read 1 Corinthians 10:11-13.

¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Paul warns them that just because they're part of the church doesn't mean they can freely participate in the wicked practices of their idolatrous culture and not face an accounting with God. Christ's sacrifice covers every sin for those who are truly in him. But the evidence of that will include the desire to resist sinful practices. Those who presume upon his grace and use it as a license to indulge in evil are revealing they aren't really united with Christ and born of his Spirit. So Paul warns the people of Corinth – don't think you're standing on firm ground if you're indulging in sin or you may fall flat on your face in the judgment.

As followers of Christ, they must resist temptation and fight against sin. And despite the fact that temptation was so prevalent in their culture, Paul makes it clear that the Corinthians could and should resist it. Paul encourages them in verse 13: "The temptations you face are common – many of you are dealing with the same things because of your culture. And God will help you overcome them. He won't let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, and he will provide a way of escape so you can endure." It's not that God requires perfection – there are times where we all are going to slip, but he does require perseverance. And those who persevere in the battle will see that God is faithful to keeping these promises.

Paul finishes with this plea...

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22.

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a

participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. ²² Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

He uses the example of Communion and the sacrifices in the temple to point out that you can't separate the acts of idol worship from worship itself. The whole point of taking the cup and bread in Communion is to participate in the body and blood of Christ. It isn't just an empty ritual; it has serious spiritual significance for the Christian. It's an intimate act of worship. The same was true for the worshipper at the temple in Jerusalem. When the people ate the sacrifices at the altar, it wasn't just empty ritual, it was participation in worship.

So even though the food offered to idols is nothing and idols themselves are nothing, to attend an idol feast and join in eating the food sacrificed to them isn't just empty ritual either. It's participation in the worship of demons. And you can't participate in worshipping demons and worshipping Christ at the same time. The example of the Israelites made it very clear, God hates that kind of lifestyle. It provokes his jealousy. God hates idolatry and won't stand for his people to participate in it any more than a husband or wife would allow their spouse to be involved in an adulterous relationship.

That's the kind of behavior that would lead to disqualification and Paul saw the potential for that to happen among the Christians in Corinth. So he warned them to flee from it.

Now, we don't have idols and idol worship like they did in Corinth, so how should we apply this warning to our lives? At the core of idolatry is choosing to find life and joy and meaning in something other than God – giving ourselves over to something that we depend on for purpose and fulfillment in life. And there are many ways we can do this. I think it's part of our human nature to find something

to worship. There's a longing in our souls that can only be satisfied by God, but in our spiritual blindness we seek that satisfaction in other things.

James writes about this in his letter. The people he was writing to weren't worshipping idols like the Corinthians, but they were worshipping other things and it was provoking the jealousy of God in the same way.

Read James 4:1-5.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

The people James was writing to were devoted to the things of this world rather than God. He doesn't say exactly what those things were, but I think they could be almost anything – money, possessions, work, success, notoriety, hobbies... The particular isn't the problem, the problem is in our all-consuming passion for those things. And they don't have to be inherently bad things – they can be good – but if they become the center of our focus in life, they become like an idol.

Jesus warned his followers about the same thing in Matthew 6:19-24: *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴ No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."*

Like Paul and James pointed out, God yearns jealously for us. He created us, he sent his Son to die for us, he revealed the good news of Jesus to us, he gives us his Spirit to live in us, and pours out his blessings in many ways. He does those things because he loves us, and he wants us to know him as the loving, heavenly Father he is. He wants you. He wants your heart. He wants your devotion. He wants you to trust him and love him above all things. He gives you gifts and blessings to enjoy – to lead you deeper into him but never replace him.

So for us today, I think we need to beware of this kind of modern idolatry. If we're still hanging on to sinful practices from our former way of life – things that go against God's will – we need to flee from them. Don't hang on to them like the Israelites or the Corinthians. And if we're placing any of the good things God has given us above him in our passions and focus, and they are becoming all-consuming in our lives, we need to surrender them to him. We may need to fast from them and pray to allow God to show us their rightful place so that they draw us deeper into him and don't replace him.