

Sermon Notes - August 15, 2021

(I Corinthians 10:13)

I want to talk a few minutes this morning about a Christian cliché or platitude. You know we often say certain things when people are going through difficult times to comfort them and strengthen them. But, sometimes we don't always know the right words to say, do we? You know, there's things like: "God doesn't promise you a rose garden," "everything happens for a reason," "God won't give you more than you can handle," "love the sinner, hate the sin." We have all kinds of clichés that we say, but are they biblical and are they true? I want to talk about one of those clichés that we may have used or maybe someone has said it to you.

Today, I want to base some of my comments on Adam Hamilton's book called "Half Truths," and I want to talk about our scripture lesson in I Corinthians 10: where many folks assume we get this cliché - **"God won't give you more than you can handle."** First of all, I need you to know that most people think this passage ("God won't give you more than you can handle") comes from 1 Corinthians 10:13. Paul is really talking about dealing with temptations. Now you need to understand that Corinth was a metropolitan city in Greece. It was a hodge-podge of multifaceted cultures - Orientals, Greeks, Romans, Syrians, and Jews. It also had a lot of pagan religion there. In fact, on every corner there was a carved statue of a pagan god to worship. You might say that Corinth was the modern day "Sin City." Now, what city do we associate with sin today? ... Las Vegas. Well, Corinth would've been the Vegas of today. There was sin on every corner, they believed. Corinth was one of those places where the people were given to idolatry and to sexual promiscuity and adultery. Paul is trying to tell them, "Don't give into temptation." He said, "Temptation is going to come to all of us, no matter who we are. It's common to all mankind." The Apostle Paul who wrote I Corinthians, goes on to tell the church folks at Corinth - don't be like the Israelites who were tempted, succumbed to it, and God punished them.

Just as the Israelites were going through the desert after God had delivered them from Egyptian bondage, and he was leading them into the promised land, they got upset with God. They wanted food and water,

and God gave them that. Moses went up on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, and they thought Moses had forgotten them. They had forgotten all about God, too. They started creating gods of their own. They had a golden calf carved out to worship. They even attacked the Moabites, defeated them, and started taking their women for their sexual pleasure, even though they were also married. God told them not to disobey and they didn't listen. They succumbed to temptation and God punished them. The Apostle Paul said, "Guys, take that as a warning" -- God wants you to flee from immorality and from pagan idolatry. (No temptation has overtaken you, but what is common to man.)

Have you ever noticed that our temptation comes sometimes when we're tired? Sometimes it comes when everything is going well and we least expect it, but temptations come to all of us -- whether it's to cheat at school because we haven't done our homework; whether it's to cheat or steal at work; whether it's to cheat on our spouse; whether it's the temptation to lie or gossip or slander someone. I like the prayer that somebody said, "Lord, so far today, I haven't grumbled and I haven't lost my temper. I haven't been mean or nasty or grumpy. But, in a few minutes, I'm going to get out of this bed and I'm going to need all the help I can get." Sounds just like us, doesn't it? ***Temptation is always lurking around us.***

But, what Paul is saying to the Corinthians and to us is - "God always provides a way for us to get through temptation." He's given us the Holy Spirit; He's given us his Word to lean on. Our problem is that God puts speed bumps in our way sometimes. He even places people in our pathway saying, "Are you sure that you can handle this? Maybe you should go the other way." And, we don't listen, do we? That temptation is so great and so intense that we just think of all the pleasure and all it's going to give us. Jesus says that you can get through temptation. Paul says, "You can get through it because God is with you and God is always there to walk you through it." No temptation will overtake you, but such is common to all men and God will provide a way for that temptation for you to escape. Now, we have to choose to resist and to walk God's way.

Where do we get this idea - "God won't give you more than you can handle"? Well, in that passage, did you notice that it says, "God won't

allow you to be tempted beyond what you can endure”? We misquote it and we say that “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” When we talk about this verse, Paul is not talking about the difficulties and adversaries of life we go through - he’s talking about temptations. When we go through trials or adversaries in life, there are some things that feel like we can’t handle it, don’t they? For example: a death by suicide, the death of a parent or a spouse, the loss of a child, a particular terminal or chronic medical diagnosis, the loss of our job and our home and our possessions because of a natural disaster, etc. There are all kinds of things that can cause us to feel like we can’t handle it. Sometimes, it’s one of those things; sometimes it may be several things, but we feel like we can’t handle it.

When we say that, “God won’t give it to us,” it sounds like God gave us all that pain and suffering, doesn’t it? But, he doesn’t give us that pain and suffering. Sometimes pain and suffering is the result of choices that we made; sometimes it’s choices that somebody else made and we just happen to catch part of the brunt of that; sometimes it’s natural disasters that we have no control of; ***sometimes there are just things that happen in life that are part of our human experience, but they are not because God gave it to you and me.*** Do you think that God wanted somebody to abuse you or molest your child? Do you really think that God wanted somebody to kill your friend? ... No. God created the world and said, “It’s good.” He created human beings and said, “They’re good.” In Jeremiah, God said, “I know the plans that I have for you -- plans for your prosperity and your future.” God created us with good, and wants the best for us - not pain and suffering. That’s not part of God’s plan, but it’s part of the created world in which we live and our human experience. Bad things happen in life, and sometimes you may feel like it’s more than you can handle.

I read a story in Adam Hamilton’s book that said a lady went to see a counselor - a psychotherapist. She said, “I’m having trouble dealing with my mother’s suicide.” She said, “I know that God won’t give me more than I can handle, but I’m just having a hard time with this.” The counselor started laughing in her face and he said, “What do you think my business is, ma’am? I’m here to help you handle the stuff you can’t

handle.” She said, “Well, I guess I never thought of it that way. God does give us doctors and therapists to help us, doesn’t he?” He was taken a little aback. ***God gives us other people to help us and God gives himself to help us.*** “God won’t give you more than you can handle,” because God doesn’t give it to begin with. **Maybe the better translation is: “God will help us handle whatever we’ve been given.”**

Do you remember Psalm 23? “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” Remember what we read in the Old Testament reading this morning (Psalm 46:1) - “God is our Strength and our Refuge, a very present help in time of trouble.” One translation says, “He’s our help and our strength and he’s always near whenever there is trouble.” Jesus, after his resurrection and before he ascended to the Father, told his disciples to go and teach and baptize, and then he said, “Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world, to the end of the age.” **He’s always with us to carry us through whatever is going.**

Some of you have heard the name Annie Johnson Flint. You may not remember her, but she wrote a poem that I think you’ll remember in a moment. Annie Flint was born in the late 1800’s. Her mother died when she was 3-years old. Her father became sick after that and wasn’t able to take care of her and her siblings. He gave up she and her siblings for adoption. Before she finished high school, her adopted parents both died. Now, she’d lost both her parents and her adopted parents. She went on to complete high school, studied to be a teacher, and even taught for a few years. She hadn’t been teaching but a few years when all of a sudden she was diagnosed with a degenerative spine disorder that put her in a wheelchair for the next 40-years of her life. Annie had to drop out of teaching, but she loved poetry and began writing poetry. A few years later, she developed arthritis in her hands and couldn’t write, and she had to dictate her poetry to one of her students. One of her poems that you may have heard is: “What God Hath Promised.” And, these are part of the words in that poem: “What God hath promised is not days full of sunshine and clear blue skies. What God hath promised is not necessarily flowers thrown on your path way every day. What God hath not promised is peace without pain, joy without sorrow, sun without rain.

But what God hath promised is strength for the day, light for the way, rest from your labors, grace in your trials, help from above, undying love, and unfailing sympathy.”

What God hath promised is to be with you and I - to walk with us through whatever we go through in life. The Bible doesn't promise us that we won't have adversities and difficulties in life. It doesn't say that we won't face temptation - in fact, it lets us know that we will face temptation. It doesn't promise us a rose garden, as somebody told me in high school when my parents died. “Peggy, life's just not easy. God doesn't promise us a rose garden” - that wasn't very comforting to me right then. Sometimes the things we say when people are going through difficult times are difficult - sometimes they're not comforting. They can be hurtful even though people know we meant to encourage or strengthen them.

I want you to remember that God won't give you that pain and suffering - but in our human experience in this created world, we will face adversity. But, God will walk through whatever you deal with. He will be there to see you through it.

I also want you to remember that God gave us one another. He gave us a community of faith - of believers - to walk with us through those difficult times - to be “God in the flesh” to us and care about us. I heard a story about a woman who suddenly lost her husband and her only son in a car accident. Somebody pulled out in front of them and killed them instantly. She was overwhelmed with grief and sadness and didn't know what to do. She was completely discombobulated. I want you to know that her Pastor and two or three people from her Sunday School class went to see her that afternoon. The Pastor said these words: “I know that you're going through a difficult time and I can't explain all that has happened to you right now, but I know this - God is with you and we care. What can we do to help?” He knew that she might not be able to tell them what she needed, but he and the ladies in that Sunday School class started doing things to walk alongside that lady in her grief. One lady took care of her kids and took them back to her house; one cleaned her house and fixed some food so she had something to eat. The Pastor sat and drank coffee and listened to her and prayed with her. The Pastor

called another church member to come and mow her grass. For the next six months to a year, this grieving lady said, “Different people in that Sunday School class walked with me as I went through the loss of my child and my husband – our wedding anniversary, their birthdays, Christmas, and all those special times. They were truly God-in-the-flesh to me.”

So, I want to remind you that God won't give you more than you can handle. God doesn't give it. Life does and our human experience in this created world. But, God will help you handle whatever you face and deal with in life, and he's given us one another. So, when you read 1 Corinthians 10:13, remember that the temptations coming – this day – this week. “Lord, help me when I get out of this bed. I need all the help I can get.” God is there, ready to help us. I want you to know when you go through the difficult times in life and adversity comes – that rejection, that break-up, whatever it is you go through – God is there to walk with you all the way. And, we have a community of faith here. May we be “God-in-the-flesh” to one another. May God strengthen us as we go through the difficult times of life, and may God help us to be “God-in-the-flesh” to someone in need. I hope we won't just say, “God won't give you more than you can handle.” Maybe we'll say, “The Lord is with you and I care. How can I help?” – and may we find practical ways to do it. Amen.