

You've Been Warned!

Tragic Lapses

By William Boekestein

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Covenant Reformed Church
47 S. Church St.
Carbondale, PA 18407

Website: www.covenantrc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/covenantrc

1 Corinthians 10, beginning in verse 1,

“1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.' 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Imagine or try to imagine, a Bible with no people. A Bible with no people. What if God's word was all abstract? Ethical instruction, yes. Gospel testimony, yes. But all abstract. No people. No character sketches. No examples. It's impossible to imagine almost, isn't it? And the reason for that is because our Bible is an historical book filled with people just like us. The Scripture, then, is a divine book which is the truth and the wisdom of the will of God. Yes, ethical instruction, gospel testimony, story of God's dealings but which connects with us through a very earthy and human element.

As we think about the human element of Scripture, it is nowhere more pronounced, perhaps, than in Scripture's description of the fall, the falls of God's people. The Bible

reveals to us the sins of God's people not just theoretically but also historically. There are examples of people who sin. In other words, the Bible doesn't just say in Romans 3:23, for example, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," the Bible also gives examples of many of God's people, graphic stories of those who sinned greatly and tumbled short of God's glory. So, what we can say then in a sense, is that Romans 3 where it said, "For all have sinned and fall short of God's glory," is illustrated by Genesis 3 and following. So, in Genesis 3 we witness Adam recklessly rejecting God and eating the forbidden fruit and from that point on, we have story after story after story of sinners doing the same thing so that when we come to Romans 3:23 and read, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," we say, "Yeah, that's true. I've seen this story after story in the Bible." One case study after another in the fallenness of man.

Friends, this morning we hope to embark on a several month series in which we evaluate some of the tragic lapses of Scriptural people, tragic falls, tragic collapses. I want to look at quite a number of them, Lord willing, and our purpose in doing so, which I'm going to actually elaborate upon in this entire sermon, is twofold: first of all, our hope is that as we study the heart wrenching sins of God's people that we'll see ourselves, that we'll be able to look into the word of God as a mirror and sort of stumble back and say, "Whoa, that's a picture of me and it's ugly and it's startling." But more than that, we hope like the Greeks at Jesus' last Passover, to have this wish fulfilled: we wish to see Jesus. We don't just look into the mirror of the Old Testament lapses and collapses and falls to see ourselves and our sins, we also see Jesus as he shines through the sins of God's people, as he shows himself and his gospel and his grace and his benefits to be greater than all of the sins which we will be inundated with, Lord willing, in the coming months. He shines through the sins of God's people in ancient history, in the Old Testament, likewise in the New Testament pages of Scripture and likewise in the stories that could be written here of this people as we have sinned time and again. So, this is our goal.

This morning, we hope to spend the entire time introducing the approach or the idea of studying characters in Scripture and not just for the sake of this series, not just so that we can sort of track a right course for this series but also for your own studies, for your own reading of Scripture. Doubtless, you read Scripture: you read the Old Testament and you read stories of people who just collapsed. Just lost their course and fell into great sin and you might wonder, "What am I supposed to do with this? How am I supposed to read this? How am I supposed to apply this?" Hopefully, what we're saying here in this sermon is not just tracking a course for us in this series but it will be a benefit for you and me as we study Scripture even on our own.

We're going to begin this morning by considering some potential pitfalls of character sketches or case studies. That's what we're going to be doing in the next several months, Lord willing, is to be looking in the Old Testament and a few New Testament examples of people who sinned and we're doing character sketches. We're looking at their person; we're looking at a case study of a particular sin and an interaction with God resulting from that sin. But there are pitfalls in our way, perhaps, in this course of study. Biblical character sketches, you might have noticed, are not commonly heard from Reformed pulpits and there are many reasons why many of the sermons you hear preached on Bible

people are not worth the paper they're printed on. I'm going to outline a few reasons why you've probably heard sermons on Old Testament people and said, "That really doesn't sound like a Christian sermon."

Here are some reasons why, some things we want to avoid as we go down this road: 1. Case studies or character sketches can be simplistic and individualistic. Simplistic case studies take a story from the Old and New Testament and boil down that story as quickly as possible to get to what's sometimes called the kernel of application. Can I translate that for you? What does this story mean for me? Alright, that's what we want to get to as quickly as possible. What is this Old Testament story mean for me? How does it apply to me? But you see, that's simplistic because the Bible wasn't written just for you, was it? It was written for many other people in many other times in history so to ask, "What does this mean for me?" is rather simplistic. In boiling down these stories, the speaker or preacher often fails to understand or articulate why the story is actually included in Scripture. You see, that becomes somewhat irrelevant in this kind of an approach, right? Who cares why it's included in Scripture, I want to know what it means for me. That's simplistic, it's individualistic. You see, the Bible is not a collection of self-help techniques. Brace yourself for this but it's not all about you. It's not all about me. It's about God, you see. The Bible is a grand story about God, about his redemptive work, about what he's doing and that's what we want to see as we approach these stories. Not to boil them down simplistically, Adamistically, individualistically. We want to see the big story here. What does this say about God?

Then, what does that mean for his people of which I, by the grace of God, am a part? So, case studies can be simplistic and individualistic, secondly, case studies can be moralistic and man-centered. Moralistic and man-centered and by moralistic I mean that some sermons about biblical characters exclusively or almost exclusively emphasize the, what? Moral of the story. What's the moral of this story? What's the pithy point of application that we can draw from this? What's the moral? And as such, they can hardly be called Christian messages. Why? Because if your approach to working with Old Testament stories is to get at the moral of the story, then your sermon could just as easily be preached in a Jewish synagogue or in a Muslim mosque or in a Civic Center in any town in America. You see, if all we're interested in is the moral, it's not really a Christian message.

Take for example, a bad sermon on Achan, in Joshua 7. Achan stole some goods, some plunder from a victory that he wasn't supposed to take. A moralistic sermon on Achan, Joshua 7, might make a grand point that crime doesn't pay. That's a moral, isn't it? That's a true statement. Can we all affirm that? Crime doesn't pay. That's not a Christian message, though. That's a moral message that anybody could say. A Muslim could preach that message. Such a moralistic approach fails to recognize the real point of the story and we may get into this later in the course of the series but the real point of the story is that Achan was a covenant-breaker who rejected God's promise of redemption in Christ. The story isn't so much about Achan, it's about the majesty of God and the promises of God which are rejected here in this passage. So, in the passage insofar as Achan's actions are concerned, I should say.

So, case studies certainly can be moralistic and man-centered and we want to avoid that approach at all costs. Then, thirdly and as a result of the two previous points, case studies can be Christ-less and, therefore, hopeless. If a case study excludes Christ and focuses only on what we should learn from the exemplars failure or victory, then that message can only communicate hopelessness and sadly, friends, this is the kind of diet that many people are fed with in churches where moralistic, man-centered, individualistic stories about Old Testament saints are preached. It's not invigorating. It's not encouraging. It's not applicatory. It's damning, you see, because Jesus says in John 15:5, "Without me you can do," what? "Nothing. Without me you can do nothing." We all know that. We would affirm that and yet we would hear a sermon story which is all about what we need to do. Here's what Daniel did, be like him. Here's what Jonah did, don't be like him. But we say to ourselves, "Without Christ I can do nothing and I haven't heard anything about Christ." You see, such preaching exacerbates our inability. Instead of giving Christians strength and help for the day, it's actually loading them down with guilt and reminding them what they cannot do. Now, is there a place for taking these Old Testament stories and drawing principles from them and sending us forth to live as Christians? Absolutely and we're going to get there but, you see, we get there through Christ. Messages that are Christ-less are hopeless.

This is not what the Bible does. When the Bible itself sets before us a pattern of how to deal with these Old Testament lapses, it doesn't exclude Christ. In fact, it gets to Christ through those stories. Let me just give you two examples to whet your appetite here. Take for example Adam, Adam's fall, Adam's sin. Preaching the fall of Adam as simply a warning against pride and carelessness which, no doubt, is done, would have been absolutely unthinkable for the Apostle Paul. Absolutely unthinkable. You see, for Paul when he reflects on Adam's sin as he does in some detail in the early part of Romans including up to Romans 5, he doesn't say, "Now, therefore, don't be careless like Adam was. Don't be prideful. Don't be reckless." No, he says, "This, you see, gets us to Christ." In Romans 5 it's this grand comparison between Adam's failure and Christ's success and so he thinks of Adam's sin as a segue to Christ's sufficiency. That's proper handling of an Old Testament lapse, of an Old Testament fall.

Or, take for example the writer of Hebrews when he considers the grizzly murder of Abel by Cain. Now, you could hear that story read somewhere and someone could say, "Well, here's the moral of the story: don't murder your brother," or some other thing that's not necessary even to say. That's not what the writer to the Hebrews does. In Hebrews 12, the writer says that the blood of Christ speaks of better things than the blood of Abel. So he thinks about this Old Testament murder and he's reminded of Genesis 4:10 in which Cain was told that Abel's blood is a testimony against you. That blood cries out from the ground against you, Cain. Then he says in Hebrews 12:24, "By contrast, Christ's blood also cries out." Christ's blood speaks a better message. The blood of Christ speaks the good news of the gospel of God's grace. Abel's blood cries out, "I need vengeance." Christ's blood cries out, "It is finished."

So, you see, this is how we have to approach these Old Testament stories. Not in a Christ-less way but as a way that leads us to Christ so that we can have hope, real hope for our lives. So, yes, there are some potential pitfalls to preaching Old Testament character sketches or case studies, however, these potential pitfalls should not deter us from using the failures of sinners for our example and admonition. Those are two words that are borrowed from Scripture, 1 Corinthians 10. So, we're going to consider, then, the precedent for case studies or character sketches. There are potential pitfalls but there is also a precedent. We have a biblical case for making case studies.

I see this in two ways: first of all, Scripture actually teaches us how to handle these tragic lapses. Scripture gives us an authoritative interpretive key for handling these Old Testament falls. Several. I'm going to focus just on three texts and mainly on the one we read earlier, 1 Corinthians 10. 1 Corinthians 10 provides the clearest mandate for what's sometimes and I think rightly called, exemplary preaching. Not to say that the preacher is exemplary, that he preaches so well but he's preaching by way of example, exemplary preaching, is what we hope to do. Exemplary preaching on the sins of our ancestors. So, what we heard in 1 Corinthians 10 is this: the redeemed community which collectively drank from the spiritual rock of Christ was that community with which God was not pleased, at least with many or most, as the text says.

So, Paul sketches out for us a bit of Israel's history: they heard the gospel, in a certain sense they drank of Christ, they rebelled against God, with most of them God was not well pleased. Now, he's going to go into greater detail in a moment but what he says next is this and he says it with crystal clarity, indeed, with repetition. I think at least four times in the text we read, he explains to us that this is for our admonition: these things became our examples that we should not do as they did. There are potential pitfalls but the Bible says these are examples.

I remember at an exam for one of our future ministers, the person was asked, "Do you believe that we should preach the Old Testament characters as examples?" "Oh, no, no, I don't believe that. We should preach Christ, not their examples." The questioner said, "What do you think about 1 Corinthians 10 saying that these things are for examples?" He said, "Oh, I'm going to think about that." You see, Scripture says something that we might wrestle with a little bit, they are for our example. This is no moralism, you see. Paul connects their sins to God and Christ. He highlights here how the faithfulness of God ministered to the floundering of sinners. Nonetheless, he says, "these things happened to them as examples and were written for our admonition." Paul says elsewhere, "These things weren't written for them, that Abraham was justified by faith. That wasn't written for Abraham. That was written for us." Right? Examples.

Just in case, let me quote Calvin here, just in case. In the words of Calvin commenting on 1 Corinthians 10, "They are a lesson to us." They are a lesson to us. He goes on to say, "A picture for our instruction." Well said. A picture for our instruction. Calvin goes on to say that "we need these kinds of examples lest we think that we are beyond the reach of danger." It seems the Corinthian church, at least some of them, thought they were beyond the reach of danger. Paul says, "No. Remember. Remember."

So, 1 Corinthians 10. In a similar vein, let me reference here Luke 17:32. Here Jesus is teaching on the need to be prepared for the Second Coming, for his glorious coming, for his Judgment Day. He says, "Be prepared." But, you see, he doesn't just teach it abstractly. He doesn't require us to imagine a Bible without people. No, Jesus says, ominously, "Remember Lot's wife," and all of a sudden, Bible students are thrown back into the Old Testament and what in some minds might have just been theory, "Yes, Christ is coming again in judgment so I should be prepared for that," all of a sudden gets concretized. "Remember Lot's wife." She wasn't prepared for judgment and she was turned into a pillar of salt.

You see, the power of exemplary preaching, Jesus grounds his teaching in a memorable, tragic, human example and that's what we're hoping to do in the coming weeks: to ground the teaching in memorable, tragic, human examples. Let me give you one other example, this time from Philippians 3. I'm going to read verse 17 but we need to read verse 18 as well, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." Now, Paul is saying here through the righteousness that he has in Christ not because of anything that he has done, he's saying, "Look, follow my example and take note of those who are like me, who walk like me." And I think I've mentioned before that the word here to "take note of" is a Greek word from which we get our word "scope" like telescope or microscope. In a sense he's saying, "Examine me. Examine others. Deconstruct our lives and learn from us. You have in us a pattern, after all."

Now, that's where we sometimes stop but listen to verse 18, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." Paul says through his own tears that there are those who "do not walk as I do and you need to note them too. You need to pay attention to them as well," and you can do that through the Old Testament lens as well. There are some in the Old Testament who do not walk, did not walk as God calls us to walk, take note of them.

So, what is the precedent for case studies? Well, Scripture teaches us how to handle tragic lapses, it gives us interpretive keys by which to understand these texts and then secondly, and rather obviously I would say, Scripture records copious examples of men's sins. If God didn't want us to benefit from the examples of men's sins, then why did he put so many examples in Scripture? It's impossible to miss. In fact, the Old Testament, maybe this has been your experience before, the Old Testament is so laden with sinful accounts that if we don't read them properly, we might be prone to despair. You read through certain books in the Old Testament and you just kind of slouch back in your chair after a while and say, "What is going on here?" You read the book of Judges, for example, and you say, "Is this the people of God?" It can be demoralizing. It can be discouraging if you don't read it through the lens of the coming Messiah to which these lapses point in these texts.

But, you know, we find the same thing in the New Testament. It's not just Old Testament. The gospels and Acts give historical records of tragic lapses. Tragic lapses. You read about Simon Magus, for example, and if you're reading the book of Acts for the first

time, you'd be reading through and you'd say, "Well, here is an asset to the church. This is a man that the church needed and was looking forward to. A good leader." Then your heart is just dashed as you find out later that he was trying to buy the Holy Spirit. The apostles call him to repent and warn of God's judgment if he doesn't. Or take the example of Peter himself. Not apostate as Simon Magus apparently was but a backslider. A man of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ, an apostle, denying Jesus Christ? Wow.

The epistles also name both backsliders and apostates. Why? For their benefit? Well, to some extent yes, but for our benefit. Paul accuse Hymenaeus and Alexander of rejecting faith and good conscience. He says of them, "Concerning the faith, they have suffered shipwreck." Now, you've never been on a shipwreck probably. I've never been on a shipwreck but in the ears of first century readers, that would have sent shivers down the spine because probably some of them had been on shipwrecks before and Paul said, "They have made shipwreck of their faith. Beware. You've been warned." Likewise, Demas as Paul had forsaken him, having loved the world. So, you've got some apostates mentioned in the New Testament. You also have backsliders. Let me mention again Peter. In Galatians 2, the Apostle Paul publicly exposes Peter's hypocritical interaction with the Gentiles. Why? For Peter's sake? Yes, to some extent. For those around him? Yes. But for our sake.

So, there is biblical precedent for case studies. Let me move on to thirdly, then, the profit of case studies. What benefits can we anticipate? Why should we be looking forward to this series and I hope that we can anticipate having examples of sins set before us in the coming weeks for these kinds of reasons and I hope we'll be able to invite others to come and join hearing about these tragic lapses so that we can see Christ shine through them. Let me just give you a few points of profit: 1. Case studies of sin summarize the Bible's message. As I said before, it's possible for character sketches to fragment Scripture by isolating a passage from the big picture. What's the big picture? The big picture of the Bible is fall and redemption, right? Fall and redemption. That's the big picture story. It's possible to take those individual stories and isolate them but it's not necessary to do so. Each story of fall and redemption is a biblical microcosm. Certainly that's true of Adam's fall, a biblical microcosm, but in every sin and every point of redemption, you've got the Bible story being told. That's a reason to study these things. The pattern of the first sin and of God's gracious intervention is repeated throughout Scripture so that we don't lose this message: we need redemption from sin and shame and we find it in Christ. That's why we have these stories repeated chapter after chapter.

So, case studies of sin summarize the Bible's message. Secondly, case studies of sin familiarize us with our own story. You hear this in counseling, don't you? It may be practical to understand that your father was a drunk, that may be necessary for you understanding your life. It may be necessary to know that your mother struggled with worry or whatever. Well, in a somewhat similar way, the stories in Scripture are our stories and so knowing how our ancestors struggled with sin helps us to wrestle more thoughtfully with our own situations. Maybe your father or mother or an aunt or uncle or respected person in the church, maybe one of those persons has come alongside you one day and said, "Let me tell you, young man, young woman, some of the things that I went

through because of my sin. Don't make the same mistake.” You see, that's what our family members, our spiritual ancestors, that's what they're saying to us as they come alongside us.

One of the ways that they minister to us in this way is to prevent us from holding pity parties. Have you ever held a pity party? “My situation is the hardest situation that's ever been faced in the history of this world.” You know, we tend to think that the temptations that we face are unique. “No one has ever faced what I’m going through.” One writer puts this mentality this way: “Contemporary Christianity is often crippled by the pervasive suspicion that things are worse now than they've ever been.” Friends, can we all agree to get over that line of thinking? Can we please stop hearing, “Oh, things are as worse now as they've ever been.” Nonsense. Have you ever read the book of Judges? “Oh, the church is in as great a state of disrepair as it's ever been. It's as hard to be a Christian today as it's ever been.” Are you crazy? Have you not read the Bible? Have you ever read the Kings? Have you ever read 1 Corinthians? There was a man sleeping with his father's wife and some people commended him? Some people put up with him? They needed Paul to tell them to excommunicate him? Things are as bad as they've ever been? I don't think so.

1 Corinthians 10:13 rebukes this notion theologically. What did we read in 1 Corinthians 10:13? “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man,” so let's get over our pity parties but stop saying things are as bad as they've ever been, stop saying we know things are going to get worse because of how we perceive things going. It's unbiblical and it overlooks the fact that what Paul says next is, “God is faithful and will never allow the church to be tempted beyond what it is able to bear.” 1 Corinthians 10:13 rebukes this notion theologically but the sad stories of the sins of countless men and women of Scripture rebuke this notion historically and so we look back in our own history and see the man after God's own heart fornicating, murdering. Are you telling me it's as hard as it's ever been to be a Christian? No way.

Case studies of sin familiarize us with our own story so we don't develop complexes about how hard it is to be me. It is hard to be you. It's hard to be me. I don't mean to be insensitive here to the struggles that we do endure but this kind of study gives us perspective.

Thirdly, case studies are profitable because they reveal the horror of sin. I'm not saying that this is worse today than it's every been but you look at the movies that we see or the television that we watch and here we've got sin portrayed positively, promoted, enjoyed. Do you think that doesn't have an effect on us? Do you think we don't grow numb to the horrors of sin? Scripture alone handles sin with a kind of honesty that we need and sometimes more than we would like.

I know I've shared this with some of you here but I think it's worth sharing again. I don't mean to keep criticizing this writer but in an otherwise excellent book on Genesis which we studied as a congregation some years ago, J. G. Voss almost completely passes over the scandalous sin of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. A 500+ page book, he handles

Genesis 38 in a page and half. He gives this defense, "Some of the deeds recorded in this chapter are so morally offensive and so shocking to modesty and good taste that the present writer would hesitate to use the chapter as material for class discussion." Friends, with all due respect, that's unbiblical. That's unbiblical. Scripture contains that account for our instruction, for class discussion or sermon preaching or private devotions or whatever. The point is that if that account of a man of God seducing a prostitute which turns out to be a relative of his, if that makes somebody uncomfortable, praise the Lord. We need to be made uncomfortable by sin because sin brings pain.

So, we need to peer into the dreadful deeds that effect dire consequences: debt, shame, alienation, pain. Ultimately, not just to protect ourselves from these things but because ultimately sin offends a holy God who hates it. That's why we need to see sin in all its horrors because we love God and we don't want to offend God. Some of the sins that we're tempted with today are respectable, are cultural. It's always been that way and that's why we need Scripture to define sin and it sometimes does so by way of biographical detail. Culture doesn't define sin, God does. Sin isn't defined socially, it's defined theologically and so we need case studies of sin to reveal the horrors of sin.

Fourthly, case studies of sin are profitable because they call us to watchfulness. Watchfulness. You know, whenever someone falls into sin, or very often I should say. Whenever someone falls into sin especially if it was a public person, everyone asks the same question: "How did this happen? How did this happen because this man of God, one of God's, fell into sin? How did this happen?" Well, the answer is: a lack of watchfulness. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation." Why did this person fall into temptation? Can we not suspect it's a lack of watchfulness and prayer?

So, these case studies can do a few things for us in this regard. First of all, they call us to watch and evaluate your own heart. Does Scripture describe you when it exposes a dreadful fall? It should. I hope it does. We need to evaluate our own hearts, evaluate some of the steps that we might be going down that are similar to those who have lapsed greatly. So, watch your own heart through these case studies.

Secondly, watch out for the enemy. 1 Peter 5:8 talks about the devil as a roaring lion and in that text, calls us to watch out for him and case studies can familiarize us with Satan's tactics. You know, Satan is not infinitely creative unlike God. Satan is redundant. He's repetitive. So, yes, our greatest protection against spiritual danger is to cling to our Shepherd but we also must know the methods of our opponent. How has Satan operated in the past? And how can we expect him to continue to operate.

Also, case studies help us to watch and learn how to respond. You look at some of these examples from Scripture and sometimes the sinners of Scripture fail to repent and perish in their sins. Some of the accounts are chilling. I mean, you read about Saul and you read about how this man, you're all pulling for Saul when you start reading about him in Scripture. He's man who is rescuing Israel, the first king of Israel and the way that he perishes, the way that he falls is chilling. We don't see him repenting. That's a warning.

Watch out. Sometimes sinners do repent and that's encouraging. You read David's Psalm of repentance and you're invigorated. You read about the recovery of Peter, for example and you say, "Wow. He fell that far and yet God lifted him up." Watch out for how these people respond to their sins.

Then, lastly, case studies of sin paint a perfect backdrop for Jesus Christ. Truly, Jesus is on every page of Scripture. He is there but sometimes we see him most clearly on the darkest pages. As stars shine brightest on a dark night, so Jesus shines most gloriously on the gloomiest canvas and we're going to see some of these examples where Jesus Christ shines so brightly because it's so dark. These case studies remind us that Christ was tempted as fully as anyone in history. Worse than David when he sees a naked woman who is beautiful on his balcony. Worse than any saint in Scripture and yet he sustains every temptation. So, as we grapple with our failures, we rejoice at Christ's victory. Those are the two things that we want to pursue: seeing ourselves and our failures and grappling with them and seeing Christ shine through them.

For hundreds of years, Jewish unbelievers but historically pious Jews, on the Day of Atonement, will hear the book of Jonah read through and after the reading, they respond in unison, "We are Jonah," and that's a good response. That should be our response. But you know what Christ said when he read the book of Jonah? He said, "I am Jonah. I am a greater Jonah." The sin of Jonah, the lapse of Jonah actually serves as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ and he shines so brightly because Christ can say, "As Jonah, so-and-so, such-and-such, so much more I."

That's our approach, friends. Only in Christ's successes can we find encouragement in our struggles and so we pray that God would help us to realize this goal in this study, to see our struggles, these tragic lapses and the Christ who shines through them all.

Let's pray.

Almighty God, we thank you for this word of yours which is so diverse and has so many facets to it. We pray that you would help us as we embark on this study of these tragic lapses and help us to be humble enough to see our own sins in these sins but also to be hopeful enough to see Christ in our place on Calvary and in heaven and on the throne of all of history drawing us to him in due time. Amen.