

## The Life of Samson #3

2001 Family Conference

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If you have your Bibles with you, I invite you to take them and turn with me to Judges 15 as we continue to read the life of Samson. Judges 15 and much of this will sound familiar to us as we looked at a number of these incidents yesterday. Judges 15:1, we read,

“1 After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, 'Let me go in to my wife, into her room.' But her father would not permit him to go in.

“2 Her father said, 'I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead.'

“3 And Samson said to them, 'This time I shall be blameless regarding the Philistines if I harm them!' 4 Then Samson went and caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

“6 Then the Philistines said, 'Who has done this?' And they answered, 'Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion.' So the Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

“7 Samson said to them, 'Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease.' 8 So he attacked them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

“9 Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed themselves against Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, 'Why have you come up against us?' So they answered, 'We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us.'

“11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, 'Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?' And he said to them, 'As they did to me, so I have done to them.'

“12 But they said to him, 'We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines.' Then Samson said to them, 'Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves.'

“13 So they spoke to him, saying, 'No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you.' And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

“14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. 15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. 16 Then Samson said: 'With the jawbone of a donkey, Heaps upon heaps, With the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men!'

“17 And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.

“18 Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the Lord and said, 'You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?' 19 So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi, and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore, which is in Lehi to this day. 20 And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.”

Please join me once again in prayer.

*Our Father, we pray that the reason why you have recorded these events would not be lost upon us but, Father, those of us of whom it could be said that the ends of the ages have come, that we would see these examples recorded in your word for our good, for our benefit, for our blessing. And, Father, may it be that there will be some in this room that will be able to testify one day that they were kept back from spiritual suicide by the wreck of the life of Samson. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.*

There are few words that are sadder for me to hear from the lips of one of my brethren than those words which begin “Have you heard what happened to So-and-so?” It was following the Southeastern Reformed Baptist Family Conference several years ago that I got back to my home and I was informed that one of the men that I went to the academy

with, the Trinity Ministerial Academy in New Jersey, one of the most gifted men. In fact, some of your old Trinity Pulpit tapes will have this man's voice on them telling you, "The following message was preached on such-and-such a date." I found out that that man had died of a heroin overdose. Yesterday at the swimming pool, I was talking with one of the pastors here about a man that was widely regarded in my academy days as the most gifted preacher in the academy and heard him tell me about his excommunication and how this man has left his wife. We've been grieved to receive letters in recent days saying, "It is my sad duty to report to you that So-and-so has fallen from their position." Imagine what would have happened several thousand years ago in the land of Israel: two Israelites might have come together and one would say to the other, "Did you hear what happened to Samson?" "You mean that man dedicated to God? Do you mean that Nazarite? Do you mean that real hairy man." "Well, he's not so hairy anymore. His head is shaven. The Spirit of God has left him. His eyes have been gouged out. And right now he's tied to a grinding wheel as a trophy to the gods of the Philistines." As someone would say in the next generation, "Oh, how the mighty have fallen."

This morning, once again, I want us to evaluate the lessons that are to be learned when a mighty one falls, when someone that we know and love and respected falls in sin. The word of God does tell us that these Old Testament narratives are not given so that we can have nice Sunday School classes on them, nice flannelgraph pictures, but they are given for our instruction. These things are recorded for us, not only that we might know the salvation of God, but they are also given to us to be warnings to us. God has given to us the record of real men and real women who might be on the one hand an encouragement to us, but on the other hand stand as a warning. In the history of our nation, we have often rallied around major defeats in battle so that there was the battle-cry, "Remember the Alamo. Remember what happened when we underestimated the power of the foe and Santa Ana came in and he destroyed everybody there in the Alamo. Let us not forget what happened there." Then there was, "Remember Pearl Harbor. Remember how the enemy came from above and destroyed thousands of lives." We need to remember these events and may it be that a rallying cry in our own hearts in the years ahead is going to be, "Remember Samson. Remember what happened to that man as he fell into the hands of the world."

Now, we have seen that Samson was a man given of God to be an agitator against the culture in which he lived. God gave him to that culture in order that he might pick a fight with it. Not that he might befriend it; not that he might love it; not that he might enter into marriage with it as he sought to do, but in order that he would fight against it. And as we saw in our last time together, rather than guarding his heart, rather than fulfilling his God-given commission, he plunged foolishly into one spiritually dangerous situation after another until, as it were, God said, "Enough. If you want to sin so badly, you want to be with the Philistines so badly, you go ahead. I'm not going to send anymore lions; I'm not going to send anymore people out there waiting to capture you. You just go your own way."

What are some lessons that we can learn from this tragic fall of Samson? Before I begin with an exposition of a passage not found here but found in the New Testament, I want to

give a qualifying statement or two regarding my use of the word “fall” and I am going to talk about how Samson fell or I will reference the fall of Samson. The Bible uses this word and we use it a lot: we talk about someone fell, “Did you hear how So-and-so has fallen from this or from that?” And we use it but it is a word that can be misunderstood. The word “fall” in and of itself has a sense of blamelessness to it. If I were to fall off this stage today, if I were getting caught up in the preaching and I fell off, no doubt, several things would happen: after you stopped your gasp, you would all start to laugh and those few from my congregation would endearingly rag on me for months to come and my family as well. But there would be some that would feel a great degree of sympathy as well. They'd think, “Well, it really wasn't the poor guy's fault. He's obviously an idiot and it's wrong for us to make fun of him. He just fell. I mean, he fell. A lot of people fall. It really wasn't his fault.” I think sometimes this mindset comes out in regard to sin and to apostasy. We say that he fell and it almost is suggesting that the person had some kind of an accident, that they didn't really mean to do it. They were just caught up in doing something and they tripped. They were just walking down the pathway and there was this hidden root and they fell over it. They were driving down the highway of their Christian life and there was some black ice on the highway and they couldn't see it and they spun out upon it or they were just out there playing golf and lightning hit them. It really wasn't their fault.

We get the idea here was this godly man, this godly woman and they were striving to keep their heart, they were desiring to be pure in the inner man and somehow they ended up in someone else's bed. My friends, that's utter nonsense. Samson's fall was the result of a determined course of action. We saw that yesterday, did we not? God met him at the first rising of his sin, God came to him over and over again to discourage him and to dissuade him in his course of action and Samson had to make the choice that he was going to go through divine roadblocks. When Samson ended up in the spiritual sewer, he got there because he lifted out the lid and he climbed down vile rung by vile rung. Sin must be sought after. No guy gets onto his computer or woman gets on their computer, signs on to check their email and suddenly there's a pornographic image. You've got to type words in. A video needs to be rented or purchased. That magazine doesn't fly off the shelf and get into your hands. You don't just suddenly find yourself in a relationship and, “Somehow we got into the back seat of the car. I don't know how that happened.” A certain phone call needs to be made. A date has to be arranged. Bitterness must be harbored. Gossip must actually be spoken. Words must be articulated to get out of our mouth. Anger must be allowed to dwell within the soul. I know certain impulses may come upon us suddenly but they must actively seek out an outlet and we need to determine, “Will I or won't I follow that impulse.”

I want to relay that as somewhat of a foundation and then now take what we have laid out over the last couple of days and now this morning, if you would please, take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of 1 Corinthians 10:12 and it is these simple words I want to open up. Let me catch the context and go back to verse 1, Paul writes,

“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 murmur, as some of them also murmured, 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.”

As we look at this now, there are three things this morning that I want to bring out. I want us to first of all consider together a dangerous conceit rebuked. Secondly, a horrible end foretold. And then thirdly and finally, a necessary and hopeful duty pronounced.

Consider first of all then: a dangerous conceit rebuked. That dangerous conceit is someone thinking that they stand. They think they have formed a settled opinion in the mind that may or may not have a basis in reality. They have come to the conclusion that nothing will ever happen to them of any spiritually dangerous consequence. They have settled it in their mind that they can flirt with certain things and nothing at all is going to happen to them. They think that they are going to stand. That word means “to be firmly grounded or rooted”; it means “to be unshakably secure in a particular situation.” The confidence that Paul is here rebuking is not the steady spiritual confidence of one who is planting himself in the fear of God. I'll have more to say about that later. It is not here a sober assessment based upon the doctrine of the perseverance and preservation of the saints. It is not the confidence that is borne of someone who has read in their Bible that we are secure in the hand of God, nothing can take us out, that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. It is not a confidence borne of an exposition of Jude verse 24 which proclaims, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling.” It is not rooted in Philippians 1:6, “that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” That's not what it is. It is a carnal sense of security. It is a carnal presumption that can at times be rooted in those rich doctrines. It is the foolish notion that I sought to address yesterday that says that, “Though that one over there might get burned when they hold fire to their breast, well, they just weren't holding it right and when I hold it to my breast, I'll not get burned. Yes, that one fell. Yes, that one's sin found him out but that won't happen to me. I can play with sin and get safely to heaven.”

Do you ever marvel at some of these stories you read about a little kid in Florida, you read, and they get their arm bitten off by an alligator and then you find out that that alligator was a family pet? And you're thinking, “What was going on in the mind of that

father and mother when they raised that little alligator?" You see, probably it was kind of cute when it was little and you could stick your finger in there and it would just bite on it a little bit and wasn't that sweet and, "We just keep him out there in the pen and we go in there and we wrestle with him every now and then." Then you're shocked when it turns on you. You see, "It won't happen to me. I know how to wrestle alligators. I know how to walk on coals. It won't happen to me."

Well, the Bible addresses that attitude in Proverbs 28:26 when it says this, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered." In the context here which I've just read in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is discussing the Jews that came out of Egypt and there they were in the wilderness and we remind ourselves that these were people of tremendous privilege. They saw the wonders of God in the land of Egypt. They actually walked through the Red Sea as it parted. They witnessed Pharaoh's army perish. They heard a voice from heaven. Saw a mountain shake. They beheld the cloud and the fire. They ate bread that came down from heaven. They drank water from a rock; a rock became a water fountain to them. There was above them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Some of them had actually witnessed the earth swallow up rebels against God. They had beheld fiery serpents in their midst destroying some. And I assure you that there was no one in that congregation, there was not a single one who doubted the reality that there was a God in heaven and that he was holy. Had Carl Sagan been there, he would have been a believer. Charles Darwin would have been a believer. They would have believed that there was a God who works wonders among men.

You would think that people who witness such things would live careful and godly lives. You would think, perhaps, that those who had witnessed so much of God's power and had seen such a display of God's holiness, who had seen the devastating effects of sin would fear offending him. If two of us were out there messing around with some particular sin, two guys are out getting drunk on the hood of their car and lightning zaps one of them, you might think that the other would put his bottle down. You would think to yourself that if anyone would live a heavenly-minded life it would be those who saw such things. And yet, those who saw such things made a golden calf. Those who saw such things rose up to play. They got involved in sexual immorality. Do you realize that when they made that calf, what was over their head? The pillar of God. Right there. I think sometimes when Aaron is making that was he burping up some manna that God had given to them? And then he goes and gets a drink from this rock. Yet they do that. They do these things. They labor in their sin while all of those spiritual realities surround them. They eat spiritual food, drink spiritual water out of a spiritual rock and yet they grumble and complain about God and his providence. They resent their new-found liberty and they actually desire to go back to Egypt.

Now Paul says, "Corinthians, this has implications for you. Brethren, these Old Testament stories have a tale to tell to you." The life of Samson is not given for us so that we can be interested and instructed, "Oh, I didn't realize that. Oh, so that's what that Hebrew word means. Oh, so that's the chronology. That's the history. Wasn't that interesting." You see, there were some in the Corinthian church who heard these "Bible stories" and rather than being filled with a sense of godly fear about their own humanity,

they were proudly thinking, “Well, such a thing could never happen to us.” And the idea is, “What an interesting story that is but it is irrelevant to me. Paul, we're not out in the wilderness. We don't live under the old covenant, we live under the new. I'm a Christian, not an Old Testament Jew. I go to a good church. I listen to living apostles. I mean, I can't decide who's my favorite, whether it's you, Paul, or Cephas or Apollos. I like a lot of them but we get good preaching.” And in light of all of that, they have the idea that they were standing, that spiritually speaking they were the kings of the mountain and that nothing and nobody could knock them off. They were growing dangerously secure, spiritual cocky and arrogant and Paul tells them, again, that “What happened to Israel under Moses happened for a reason. And do not think that you living under the old covenant can indulge in your sins without consequences. Don't believe, Corinthians, that you can go on as we heard the other night and visit the temple prostitutes and believe all will be well with your soul. Do not believe that you as a people can be factious and divisive, that you can hold bitterness and unforgiveness, that you can continue to be so lax in regard to holiness, that you can be sloppy doctrinally and that your homes and churches can be disorderly and that nothing will happen as a result of it.” He is telling them, “These things in our Bibles tell us that we cannot become smug church members. Don't begin to think that because in our church everybody is speaking in tongues and this one's got the gift of prophecy and that one's able to do this that we're okay.” And let us not think that because we have recovered the old paths and that we have Puritan theologians on our bookshelves and that we adhere to confessional Christianity and that we enjoy powerful preaching and orderly worship and that we homes-chool our children, that all will be well. My friends, that is a terrible presumption that we take, that we rest upon some of these blessings and say that, “Because I have all my theological ducks in a row and I believe in this and I believe in that that, therefore, I will never be shaken. I can engage in certain sin and stupid behavior and I won't be burned. I won't have any consequences to it.”

Consider secondly: a horrible end foretold. He says, “If you have that attitude,” essentially he's saying, “Don't be surprised when you fall. Let he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” The word “fall” means “to descend from a higher place.” It can also mean “to come under condemnation; to be cast down from a state of prosperity to a state of poverty; to fall from a state of uprightness.” That's the idea and he is saying, “Don't be surprised at what is going to happen to you.” When you leave off, watch in your arrogance that “I'm strong enough to handle it,” don't be surprised that when you see a person who refuses to deal with the first risings of sin, someone who does not deal with his conscience, someone who may have heard what they heard this morning from Pastor Hartland and you knew he was talking about you and your wife didn't need to bruise your ribs, the Spirit of God was doing that in your heart and you know you're that kind of man. You know you're sinning. You know you're calling Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” and yet not doing what he says and you go from here and you think, “Well, I'm just going to ignore it.” My friend, that is so dangerous. That's playing with your conscience. That's rationalizing away our behavior. Such a one, no doubt, will grow cold in the prayer closet and eventually either physically or spiritually they will remove themselves from the people of God. They will become that fool that Proverbs talks about who isolates himself, hiding behind walls, excusing themselves, “Well, I would be that kind of man if I had an

Ephesians 5 wife.” Refusing to confess. Refusing to repent from known sin. Telling God in essence that he can have some of your life but not all of your life. “God, tell you what, you can have my church life but hands off my cds, hands off my friends, hands off my dvds and my video cassettes. God, hands off. I write my own rules as far as those go.”

That's the fool, again, who is trusting in the strength of his own heart. “My sin won't find me out. I can actually cover my sins and prosper. What's wrong with these sins? You know, other Christians do them, why can't I? All the other guys from Christian school went out to see “American Pie,” why can't I? They all listen to that group, why can't I?” If that's your attitude, may I make a prophecy about you? You're going to fall. If I stood up here today with a 357 Magnum and put one bullet in it and I spun it around, put it to my head, how shocked would you be if I fell down dead? Some of you will say, “Well, there was only a 1 in 6 chance that would happen. I expected to hear at least one or two clicks before the guy fell.” Yet we think, zzz, click, “Hey, I didn't die today. I didn't fall. That arrogant preacher at the conference said I'd fall if I did this.” Click. “Ha, ha, happened again. I'll spin it again. Look at this.” Two years have gone by, three years have gone by, “I haven't fallen yet. I'm still in the church.” Then bam. Don't be surprised as I mentioned yesterday, don't be shocked if when you're there parked in the car and what begins as a nice little conversation and it starts with some kissing and soon your hands are under each other's shirts and then suddenly somehow or other you fall into fornication. Don't be shocked when you think, “Well, I can have this little alligator and it won't ever bite my arm.”

When Paul says “you fall” what does he mean? Well, it could mean that you fall from a place of usefulness. It could be that what he's referencing here is not that you lose your soul but that because of your carelessness, the fair name of Jesus is muddied, that because of you as happens in the life of Samson, “My name is blasphemed among the Gentiles.” They praise Dagon because of what happens. You become a source of mockery to the enemies of the gospel and perhaps you cause your children to wonder if anything in Christianity is real. Or you cause the people in church to wonder, “Well, when's it going to happen to my pastor,” as I've had to deal with in my church, when I have to read one letter after another. Let me just say here, brethren, it's our prayer as we were praying before here that we're not going to get anymore of those letters and I trust, maybe remembering Samson is going to mean that we're not and that you're not going to have to get here five or ten years from now and say, “Did you hear what happened to the guy that preached about Samson?” I've told our people in Louisville that I don't know what to do other than make some kind of a blood oath that we will disembowel ourselves rather than bring shame to them but when they hear about his one or that one or this church person or that church person and they all seem to be so godly, so spiritual, they think, “Well, when's it going to happen to you?” We're going to talk about how it won't happen to us.

Falling is more than just bringing shame a reproach to Christ. I believe that what Paul has in mind here is someone falling ultimately and that is not just that they go from being a passionate Christian to a typical lukewarm professing believer but it means that ultimately they're going to be gone, apostate, and end up in hell. Like some of the men that went to the academy. One man, I believe the story is that he wound up shot in the



back of the head in a Las Vegas desert at the hand of some gangsters. That man that died of the heroin overdose while babysitting his two children hadn't been in church for a long time. Paul says here, "What more do you need to see and hear? You have the Scriptures. You have the example of those in the wilderness, don't you? That they had all of this spiritual privilege, they had all of this spiritual responsibility and yet because they were arrogant, they fell. They died. There were their bodies scattered in the wilderness. But," he says, "you could also say, Well, think about what's going on in your own midst. You've got people in your church that need to be excommunicated and yet you're tolerating it and maybe you're tolerating it because your own sins are that bad as well. Do you really think," he's telling them, "that you're better than these Jews in the Old Testament? Is there someone there in Corinth," is there someone here today, "who thinks that you are more godly than David, that you are wiser than Solomon and stronger than Samson?" "Oh, they fell, he fell, she fell, they did but I won't."

Paul is telling them, "Listen, your problem is not ignorance. Your problem is arrogance. It's not that you don't know that, Oh, you mean if I trifle with that sin, I'm going to fall? You mean, I didn't realize fire would burn." I mentioned that stupid thing of me pouring gasoline on fire, it's not that I didn't realize something like that could happen, I was being arrogant. Arrogance which says, "I can enjoy fantasies in my mind with my neighbor's wife." The arrogance that says, "Well, because television is my Christian liberty, I can watch anything I want to on it and I can watch the soaps and I can watch Baywatch and I can listen to whatever music I want to. I can even look at pornography, I'll just view it as art. I can go to the strip bars. I can, again, watch the soaps. I can read all the romance novels full of premarital sex. I can go to the latest teen comedy with the gang and I know there's lots of swearing and there's nudity and gross-out humor with all kinds of grotesque portraits of bodily functions but it doesn't harm me. In fact, I feel really good. It gives me a buzz. It invigorates me. Man, that's hilarious! I can hold hatred and unforgiveness in my heart. I can go days without reading my Bible. I've gone weeks without prayer. Man, I am that strong!" After all, as the bumper sticker tells us, "We're not perfect, we're just forgiven."

Again, somebody says, "Well, I may not pray but I have good theology. I've got Reformed theology. I may not love my wife or submit to my husband but I'm a Sabbatarian and I have pastoral oversight. I may not be honest during it but I have it. I'm better than other Christians because do you know what I did? I went to a family conference and I listened, I endured 12 hours of preaching. Show me one of these Arminians that could do that. My church preaches holiness." But you know what? Folks that do all of that fall and I fear, I hope I'm wrong, I fear that our attitude to all of this can be, "Mm, mm, mm, that's sad but that's irrelevant to me. It's like reading about a flood in Bangladesh, 1,000 people die, wow. But who reads that and gets sandbags and puts them out in their front yard? I mean, that's thousands of miles away. It's sad but it's irrelevant. It has nothing to do with me."

But, friends, what God's word calls us to do is to look at them and then looking at them, to look at ourselves and if we take anything from the examples of Samson and David and Solomon and my academy friends and my old pastor friends, it's to say, "If they got

burned. Man, I thought they were made of asbestos. I mean, they were super Christians and if they fell, good night, what could happen to me? And if when David, the man after God's own heart, if Solomon, the wisest man in the world could do the unthinkable when they took their eyes off the Lord, who do I think I am that I can take my eyes off the Lord? If someone that strong was crushed by the weight of carelessness, what's going to happen to wimpy me?" If there was a barbell up here and one of these Hercules guys around here and I won't mention their names, there are a couple of them that I've seen, if one of them came up here and they bent down I wouldn't say, "Out of the way, buster. Let a real man show you how that's done." I'd start heading out the back door. My wife and kids, don't say anything, kids, no, no, no, no. If they couldn't lift it, I can't.

If Samson, the mighty man upon whom the Spirit of God would come rushing – that's what the Hebrew word means. The Spirit of God it says in the New King James "came mightily upon him," it rushed upon him. It hit him like a blast from a fire hose, the Spirit of God, a man of supernatural birth, consecrated life, if he made a shipwreck of his life and became a slave grinding at the wheel of the Philistines, then who in the world am I that I can play with those sins? If they fell when they indulged, I'm going to fall.

Verse 9, "Do not try then," he says, "as some of them did. Do not try the Lord," he says, "as some of them did." Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall." Then it says in Proverbs 28:14, "Happy is the man who is always reverent but he who hardens his heart might fall into calamity." I read that wrong: "will fall into calamity." You see, we read that as though it says "might." In Revelation 3, we find out how disgusting this spiritual arrogance is to the Lord. Remember there was a church that Jesus said, "Quite frankly, you make me want to puke. You make me sick." Why did they make him so sick? They were lukewarm. Well, why were they lukewarm? "Because, you say I am rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing."

I try not to read too much into it when the folks at my church tell me when I ask how we can pray for you. You see, at our prayer meeting we go through two families every week, alphabetical order, and so we start out with the A's and work our way through. Sometimes I say, "Well, what can we pray for you?" They say, "Well, nothing really. I can't think of any needs we have." I put the best construction on that and I hope that they're not saying, "I'm rich. I've become wealthy. I have need of nothing." And Jesus says, "Really? Because I have a different assessment of you. You see, you say you're rich and do you know what I think you are? Wretched. Miserable. Poor. Blind. Naked. That's what I see when I see you." "But Lord, we know the Confession of Faith and we've got catechisms and we went to the Southern Family Conference." "No, excuse me, you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. And do you want to know how to deal with those things? You deal with them in dependence upon me. You let me clothe you. Stop trying to clothe yourself. You get those things from me."

If we sit here this morning and we say like maybe the Laodiceans said, "Well, that's not fair. That's arrogant. Why does Jesus...? I'm not like that." Jesus is saying, "Listen, if the shoe fits, wear it." Don't fight against what the Spirit of God is dealing with with you. If you're here this morning and you're blameless with all of this, I'm not ragging on you but

I'm ragging on me because I know that that arrogance can be a part of my life and I need warnings like this.

But now I want to give in the minutes that remain, a necessary and a hopeful duty. He says, "Take heed. You don't have to fall and there is a way that you won't fall. You won't fall," he says, "if you take heed." The word usually means "look; open your eyes; turn your attention to; discern these things mentally; perceive them; understand; weigh carefully; examine these realities." He is commanding them and the tense here is that you need to always be doing this and it's also a command so it's not an option. If you say you're a Christian, you call Jesus "Lord, Lord," do what he says and one of the things that he says is to take heed. He's telling us here that we can never take a vacation from these things. I know some of you are very happy to be away from your jobs. That's great, that's fine, take a vacation from your job but you never get to take a vacation from your faith. There are no days off. We can never hit the slumber buzzer. "Well, just a little bit longer. A little bit longer away from you, Lord." A little slumber, a little sleep, a little pushing of the envelope, a little searing of the conscience. "I won't let it get too far. I'll just start down the hill and it won't get too bad." The Apostle says "take heed" right now and evermore. Friend, this is not some super level of Christianity.

Some of you sit here and say, "Well, I'm content to be a relatively weak Christian. I'm not one of those sold-out zealous guys. I'm just one of these regular Christians. You know, I'm not the soldier out there in the foxhole. I'm the guy that makes up their Kool-Aid afterward. So, it doesn't really matter if I'm an alert soldier or not." There is no such thing in God's army. This is boot camp. This is grade school stuff. "Take stock," he says, "wake up. Don't fool yourself. Don't lay down your gospel armor. Spiritually speaking, don't fall asleep." As we've been saying, note those areas of compromise and flee from them. As we brought out yesterday, admit that there are vineyards in your life if indeed there are, bless God if there aren't, but if they're there, what are you doing going through them? "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

Note what will happen if you do these things. If you take heed and this is wonderful, if you keep your heart, you really will stand. You will not fall. Note it well: the man, the woman, the young person who watches over their heart with diligence, who flees from youthful lusts, who confesses their sins, that's one, bless God, who's going to make it home safely.

I told you about these phone calls or these letters. A few weeks ago I got one of those but, man, it was a good one. It was in England in a church that I have a lot of contact with in the Maidenbower Baptist Church where Austin Walker is the pastor. There was a little broken man there named Fred H., some of you might have met Fred at one occasion or another. Fred had been hit by a car when he was young and he was about five feet tall and he was broken. He walked somebody said like a sand crab. He would walk sideways to get to things. Old Fred loved the Lord Jesus. Most all of his life he loved the Lord Jesus. I got the call that Fred was on vacation, his first vacation. This isn't too much of a surprise, old Fred fell down. He fell down some stairs and he cracked his skull and before long he fell asleep in Jesus. "Well done, good and faithful servant." He made it home. He wasn't

any superstar. He wasn't any big name but he was the kind of man you build churches out of and he made it home and, man, he ran through the finish line. He spent his last conscious hours preaching to his wife and to his friends and to the doctors before they put him under so that they could give him a CAT scan. He never woke up from that but, man, he burst through. He didn't limp across the line and we can be like that. We don't have to fear that the devil is going to fall upon us and destroy us and devour us while we are living humbly under the mighty hand of God. When we're striving to please the Lord, leaning on him, wanting to love him, wanting to serve him. Buddy, you're safe.

I'm going to take my family to the Grand Canyon, Lord willing, next month and from what I understand, there's going to be a fair amount of rails around the Grand Canyon. Do you know what? If I stay behind that rail, I'm not going to be a grease spot on the bottom of the floor. I'm not. If I stand right here, I'm not being arrogant and say, "I'm not going to fall off that stage." I won't. Not from here I won't. Now, if I stand on there on my tippy-toes, I might but not here. There is a place of safety and we don't need to fear when we hear this. We don't need to live our lives in panic every day, "Oh, Lord, is today the day I'm going to bring shame and ruin to you? Here I am striving to keep my heart but I'm afraid of the lightning bolt." No, the lightning bolt doesn't come like that. It comes when you take your kite and bring it up with all the metal attached to it. It's when you pick up a 50 foot pole and go dancing around in the middle of a field. That's when the lightning strikes. People fall when they're dancing on the edge, not when they're behind the rail, not when they're having their hearts kept by the power of God.

Several points here as we close. I want to encourage us in this kind of a setting to really load our consciences with the awful consequences of trifling with sin. Do you know what's helpful for me? I've said this in our home church, look beside you, look at your wife, look at your husband, if you have children, look at your children or think about your children: is that image on the computer screen worth losing them? Is the thrill and the rush of that form of entertainment worth where that may – and it may not be a problem right now, it may not be all that big a deal but where does that road go? What happens if I stay on this road? Well, I'll tell you where that road goes and brethren, let's look around us, look at our brothers and sisters in Christ, think of our sister churches, think of the lost that want an excuse to not believe, "You know, I knew they were all hypocrites," look within you: what possession do you have that's greater than your own soul?

A few years ago when I was in England, I had the opportunity of drinking tea from the Queen's china. I have a friend in England that used to be the Queen's private detective. He also used to be Winston Churchill's bodyguard, a 90 year old man named Henry V. Henry, when I would go to his little spot and share the gospel with him, we'd always have tea on the Queen's china. You know what, I never took that thing and while I'm waiting for Henry to put tea in it, tossing it up, catching it, tossing it up. Henry was old and I imagine he would have whacked me in the head if I did. I've got something far more precious than the Queen's china and I don't want to be just tossing it up, careless about my own soul.

But then, brethren, look above us to the love of the Savior. Isn't Jesus worth our remaining loyal to him? Sometimes we just need to say to our sin and to the world and to the devil when they're all saying, "Come here. Come here. Come here." Say, "I love him too much." And as our brother said with a portrait of his wife on one side of our bed have, as it were, on the other a portrait of our Savior and say, "Now, I'm his. You can't have me." And his grace is sufficient with me and the next verse here tells us that "no temptation has overtaken us but such as is common to man," and God will always be faithful and allow us a way to escape. God won't allow us to have something come into our lives that's just too much. "I had to fail. I had to lose my soul over this." No, that's not right. God has promised that he'll give us an escape hatch. We have access to his throne. He has surrounded me with grace and warnings to help me. He has given to me hope. And, brethren, in light of that let us cast ourselves daily on the grace of God, not take any time off. Guard our hearts, look to him, pray. The Psalmist says in Psalm 16:8, "I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." That's not arrogance, that's standing on the promises.

Then I also want to say something here to those of you who aren't Christians. Your unbelief is proof positive of your arrogance that you think you can stand. Your refusal to come to Christ on his terms is irrefutable proof that you think you're okay, that you can do all of these things, you can live your life in rebellion and somehow it's going to be alright. My friend, you're living in a fool's paradise and the day is going to come now or later when God's going to shake the foundation of your world.

I want to close this morning by reading a poem written by the President of the Bible college that I went to in Columbia, South Carolina and it's called "Let Me Get Home Before Dark." He says here,

"It's sundown, Lord.

The shadows of my life stretch back into the dimness of the years long spent.

I fear not death, for that grim foe betrays himself at last, thrusting me forever into life:

Life with you, unsoiled and free.

But I do fear.

I fear the Dark Spectre may come too soon —or do I mean, too late?

That I should end before I finish or finish, but not well.

That I should stain your honor, shame your name, grieve your loving heart.

Few, they tell me, finish well...

Lord, let me get home before dark.

"The darkness of a spirit grown mean and small, fruit shriveled on the vine, bitter to the taste of my companions, burden to be borne by those brave few who love me still.

No, Lord. Let the fruit grow lush and sweet, a joy to all who taste;

Spirit – sign of God at work, stronger, fuller, brighter at the end.

Lord, let me get home before dark.

"The darkness of tattered gifts, rust-locked, half-spent or ill-spent,

A life that once was used of God now set aside.

Grief for glories gone or  
Fretting for a task God never gave.  
Mourning in the hollow chambers of memory,  
Gazing on the faded banners of victories long gone.  
Cannot I run well unto the end?  
Lord, let me get home before dark.

“The outer me decays —  
I do not fret or ask reprieve.  
The ebbing strength but weans me from mother earth and grows me up for heaven.  
I do not cling to shadows cast by immortality.  
I do not patch the scaffold lent to build the real, eternal me.  
I do not clutch about me my cocoon, vainly struggling to hold hostage a free spirit  
pressing to be born.  
But will I reach the gate in lingering pain, body distorted, grotesque?  
Or will it be a mind wandering un-tethered among light fantasies or grim terrors?  
Of your grace, Father, I humbly ask...  
Let me get home before dark.”

There's a way to do that and it's taking heed to ourselves.

Let's pray.

*Forgive us, Father, for there have been times when we have trifled with grace. Father, surely everyone in here can say at one time or another in their lives that we have not known you nor loved you nor served you as we ought. And Father, we're amazed that you've kept us as you have for, Father, there are times we have jumped out of those planes, there are times we've danced on the edge. Who, like a watchful parent, you've pulled us in. But Father, we know that if we continue to trifle with grace, our sin will find us out. O God, for the sake of our own soul, for the sake of our churches, for the sake of those who love us most and for the sake of the glory and honor of Jesus Christ, let all of us get home before dark. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Amen.