

The Unexpected

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Nobody in the southeast part of the province of Saskatchewan, saw it coming – floods! The old-timers had never seen the like in this part of the province; fields became lakes and the placid Souris River became a torrent. I once saw a picture of a Saskatchewan resident water skiing in the spring, the waterway was the ditch and he was being pulled by a car on the highway. Fact or fable, who knows. This year friends of mine were kayaking across fields of water! Water was flowing over highways, many grid roads were cut to let the water run to the fields on the other side of the road, houses were and still are surrounded by water, many people lost their homes as the dikes had to be opened and water filled the valley of the Souris River. Farmers could not put in their crops, the oil rigs could not get out on the land to continue drilling. Neighbouring farmers are mad at one another for letting water flow unto one another's land; municipalities are angry for the same reason.

The unexpected challenges of life must come to test our faith and confidence in God. Paul wanted to warn the church at Corinth about this very thing and used the history of Israel in the wilderness to illustrate this truth. What we focus on in times of testing is most important; Paul wants the Corinthians to see God in the picture. God was in the cloud that covered Israel in the wilderness; God was the presence in the tabernacle every day of their journey, God was the provider for everything Israel needed in the wilderness, He was their spiritual food and drink. The manifestation of God's presence was very visible; all they had to do was look up at the cloud and the pillar of fire and be reminded that God was there.

But it was the unexpected, the challenges they faced in the wilderness that drew their focus away from God. Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:13 that these challenges or difficulties **overtake** us. James says the same thing when he writes, "... count it all joy when you **fall into** different trials...". Picture in your mind what *overtaking and falling* into really mean. Let me illustrate; we were travelling from Kamloops to Calgary minding our own business when I looked into my rear-view mirror and saw a car come racing behind us. It was a two lane hwy. and there was a truck coming from the opposite direction, in a split second I had to decide to pull over on the shoulder or stay in my lane and perhaps be part of a horrendous accident. Gripping the steering wheel with both hands, I stayed in my lane and the car passed me on the shoulder doing no less than 150 kms/hr. A minute later a police car swept by me with its lights flashing. We were quickly **overtaken** by both vehicles.

The principle of *reaping what we sow* does not apply in these situations. This is a God-thing, the trying of our faith. I am glad the principle of sowing and reaping does not always work the way we think it should. I find that God is so good that when I sow some bad decisions, God through His mercy and grace still reaps a blessing in my life. If we held strongly to the principle of sowing and reaping we could not expect God to exercise His mercy and grace. This is not an encouragement to keep on sowing trash in our life but it is good to know that when we blow it God loves to draw near and shower us with His loving-kindness. These trials do not always come because we have sinned. The whole book of Job deals with that idea; his three friends insisted that Job had sinned and for most of the 40 plus chapters they argued with Job, trying to convince him that he had sinned. Job wasn't perfect but that is not the reason he lost so much in his life. Did he expect these things to happen? Not really! In one day he lost all his wealth and all of his children. In the days to come he lost his health and his wife who I assume walked out on him. Then he suffered the days or weeks that his **friends** accused him of sinning. Why is it when people suffer loss we often think – they must have done something wrong. We forget we have an enemy who wants to steal, kill and destroy.

One day a man came home from work and found a note from his wife; she said she was leaving him, the reason was that she wanted to catch up on her teenage years that she felt were taken from her when she married at the age of 15. He had no idea she even felt like this. Another friend of mine experienced the same thing. The note blamed him for everything bad in her life and so she had purchased a ticket to England and suddenly she was gone. You don't pray for these things to happen, they just happen! My nephew had to deal with one of these things you **fall into** recently when his 17 yr. old son was accidentally shot and killed.

Israel in the wilderness was **overtaken** by a number of situations that they didn't ask for and certainly didn't expect. The first one was at the Red Sea, the waters in front of them the hills on both sides of them and the Egyptian army coming fast behind them. Their murmuring and complaining shows us what they were focused on – it was not on God. Their next trial was the bad waters at Mara, then they ran out of water, then they ran out of food. You know the stories, they complained and murmured against Moses and not once did they focus on the God Who was so near and talk to Him. The situation at Mt. Sinai challenged them to the core of their being – God wanted them to meet with Him. The trouble was He was going to show up in ways they were not used to – the thick darkness, the lightening flashing, the thunder rolling, the whole mountain trembling and shaking. They were used to the gods of Egypt who had mouths that couldn't speak, ears that couldn't hear and stone bodies that didn't move. The challenge of God's presence has shaken the religious core of our being as well. God will not always be in the still small voice, the manifestation of His presence at times will affect us so strongly that we will lose control of our bodies, there might be shaking and falling down. Our pride that doesn't want to lose control of our bodies, reduces our God to be nothing more than an Egyptian god;

God we want You but on our terms! Israel's response was – pull away from his presence, let Moses meet with God and let him share the words of God to us. Big mistake! There are times when God must humiliate our flesh to release the spirit in us, we are called to be spirit beings.

Then there was the challenge of *sameness* that Israel had to deal with. I'm talking about their God-given menu – manna and quail, quail and manna, day after day, month after month, year after year. How many different dishes can you make with manna and quail? OK so you can have hot-wings; once or twice a month might not be bad, but day after day! After the second world war there was a surplus of army rations called *spam*, does anyone remember this? Because we were considered a poor family, we were entitled to have some of this canned spam. The knock came on our door one day and there stood a soldier dressed up in his green uniform and on the street was an army vehicle. In his arms he had a case of spam and handed it to my mom who met him at the door. "Mame how many are in your family?" I think at that time there was 7 or 8 and so he made that many trips to his vehicle. Guess what we ate for the next week, months and a couple of years – *spam*! Fried, with brown sugar sprinkled on top was not bad but I think steak would have been more to our liking. We soon got tired of the sameness of spam for lunch and then again for supper. Often we allow our Christian life to become boring. We do the same things every day – our reading of the Bible and some prayer time but we don't really expect anything to happen. We are too much chicken when it comes to talking to people on the street about Jesus or praying for them and expecting them to be healed and even saved! The *sameness* of God's menu for their bodies was to get the Israelites to focus on the radical life in the spiritual life. It has to do with focus doesn't it. Today we are far more interested in the huge variety of foods for our belly than the marvellous variety of life walking in the Spirit.

In all these trials it's not our bodies that are tried, but our faith, our focus. Paul's warning to the Christians at Corinth was; don't think you are above this, what happened to Israel in the wilderness can happen to you and you too will make the same mistakes they made. Humble yourself and learn from their mistakes and keep your focus on the Lord Jesus, not on the things you have to go through.