

Paul is not a fan of ignorance; and neither am I.

Paul says it, “**For I do not want you to be ignorant...**” Ignorant of what? “**For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that all our ancestors were under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.**”

Paul is not a fan of ignorance; neither am I. Paul does not want you to be ignorant of this fact...

Honesty time: How many of you feel ignorant right now?

Flipside of the same question: how many of you feel confident that you know exactly what Paul is talking about here?

We’ve got some work to do so that you don’t walk out of here as ignorant as when you walked in... it’s always fun being called ignorant by your pastor, isn’t it?

I think one of the easiest ways to understand the truth that Paul wants us to know is this: last week we talked about how often, when we find ourselves having a hard time living generously, the problem is that we just don’t know the heart of our God well enough. Specifically, we forget how generously giving his heart is every minute of every day.

Today Paul makes a similar point – that there is something else that we tend to forget about the heart of our God – only this time it isn’t his generously giving heart, this time it is his jealous heart.

Did you know that about your God – that he is proud to call himself jealous? In fact, Jealous is one of the nicknames he chose for himself. God once said to his people through Moses, “**Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.**”

Paul’s point here is this: Do not be ignorant of the fact that your God is jealous, and if you push his jealousy, you won’t like how it turns out.

As proof he reminds us of his ancestors, the Old Testament Israelites.

God had chosen the Israelites to be his very own – his special possession, he called them. They were his, and he didn’t want to share them with anyone else. God saying that the Israelites were his special possession isn’t like some slave master in Alabama 150 years ago. This isn’t like Gollum from the Lord of the Rings squatting in some dank cave rubbing his precious ring with a crazed look in his eye. Being God’s special possession brought with it some pretty incredible benefits.

Paul lists just a few of them.

First, **they were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea** – Paul is reminding us of the Exodus, when God, through the plagues, brought the greatest nation in the world to its knees in order to set his special possession free from slavery in Egypt. When they left Egypt God led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night – the cloud was that ever present sign that God was with them, leading them to freedom – freedom that was ultimately secured on the shores of the Red Sea when God parted the waters, led his people through on dry ground, and drown Egypt’s army behind them.

Second, he mentions **spiritual food and spiritual drink**. Paul is reminding us of the miraculous way that God provided for his people (probably close to 1 million people coming out of Egypt) as they traveled through the desert... like that first lesson from Exodus 16:2-20. Every wafer of manna, every quail that flew through camp, every time God made water flow from a rock, taught the very tangible spiritual lesson that God provides for his special possession.

Then Paul takes it one more step – that water from a rock pointed to Christ; to Jesus. Not only did God’s rescue from Egypt through the cloud and sea, and his provision in the wilderness teach the spiritual truth that he would take care of them physically, those things ultimately taught the spiritual lesson that God would save them from every problem, including their biggest problem... like Jesus in that Gospel lesson for today from John 6:24-35 where Jesus teaches that God not only provides daily bread, but the Bread of Life – which is the better bread by far because it doesn’t just prolong your life for a day but gives eternal life.

“**Nevertheless,**” Paul says, “**God did all of that: Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.**”

God was not pleased with Paul’s ancestors because God is a jealous God, and they pushed his jealousy. Instead of reveling in the fact that they were God’s special possession Paul’s ancestors, the Israelites, time and time again grumbled and complained because God wasn’t doing things the way they wanted. And Paul reminds us how it turned out when they pushed his jealousy... their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. God made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until everyone that was 20 years or older when they left Egypt was dead. Hundreds of thousands of bodies left in the wake of God’s jealousy.

“**These things happened**”, says Paul, “**as examples and were written down as warnings for us... so if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall.**”

In other words: do be ignorant of, do not forget this very important truth about the heart of your God: He is a jealous God, and if you push his jealousy, you won’t like how it turns out.

What does that mean for me and you?

Well, God wants you to see yourself in the Israelites. He wants you to remember that he has chosen you to be his very own. He wants you to remember that you are his treasured possession. He wants you to remember that though you didn't watch Pharaoh's army drown in water of the Red Sea, your sins were drowned in the water of your baptism. He wants you to remember that though you have never tasted wafers of manna or drank water from a rock, you have tasted wafers of the Bread of Life and drank from the cup filled with his blood.

Nevertheless, inside your heart (and mine) there is so much grumbling and complaining (like we talked about last week when God gives us a thousand blessings but unless we have *all* the blessings we aren't happy); there is this incredible tendency to fall in love with the blessings that surround us rather than the one who gave them in the first place – this tendency to work for bread that spoils as Jesus put it, to chase after wealth, fame, success, a good reputation, comfort, safety, happiness rather than chasing after the God who gives all those things.

Even we, especially we, who like the OT Israelites, have experienced how good it is to be God's special possession need to remember that our Jealous God does not tolerate divided hearts. God wants your budget, your priorities, your schedule, your entire life to show that he and he alone is the love of your life.

God wants you to learn from the Israelites this important truth about his heart: he is a jealous God (he wants you all to himself) and if you push his jealousy, you won't like how it turns out. God gives and he gives and he gives but if you think that you are standing firm, if you take his giving for granted, if you see him giving and keep sinning anyway, watch out – he's not only a giving God, he's a jealous God.

I'm not sure about you, but that is a pretty hard pill to swallow.

As a life-long Christian I understand that it is good and proper to look at my life and see where I'm giving God cause to be jealous, but there is still something about a God calls himself Jealous that is a little bitter.

Last week's message – getting to know the generously giving heart of our God – that is a message we can all get behind. I had a lot of people tell me last week how much they appreciated being reminded about the heart of our God that gives and gives and gives and gives.

I'm not sure about you, but I find it a little harder to get as excited about a God who calls himself Jealous.

Jealousy has this big negative connotation to it. It is an unmistakably angrier side of our God; last week was the feeding the 5000 God, this week is the scattering their bodies in the wilderness God.

So what are we to do with this? How are we supposed to respond to this message about a God who says his heart is not only generous but jealous?

Well, let me tell you how *not* to respond... I pray that none of us respond the way the crowds did to Jesus in John 6.

At the beginning of John 6 we see Jesus feed the 5000 (that's just counting the men, not the women and children). At the beginning of John 6 we see a crowd of upwards of 15,000 people following Jesus around and hanging on his every word. That's like half the population of Franklin ignoring their jobs and responsibilities because following Jesus meant that much to them.

But John 6 ends with this heartbreaking line: **from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.** He went from 15,000+ followers down to the 12 disciples + a few others.

Why? Because the people realized that Jesus wasn't just a guy who generously gives daily bread, he was also a man who claimed to be sent from God the Father and wanted to be loved more than daily bread – he was jealous. He wanted to be the desire of their hearts and that – this Jesus standing in front of them telling them he came from heaven and wanted them to love him, the bread of life, more than daily bread – that was too bitter of a pill to swallow, so they left.

I pray that none of us respond the same way, because although thinking of God as a Jealous God may be a bitter pill to swallow, I don't want that bitterness to distract us from the fact that even in his jealousy God is loving.

Today, in our own everyday relationships, if I describe someone as jealous, that is almost always a bad thing – like that person is *too* possessive, *too* clinging, and they have a temper when they don't get their way. And in human relationships jealousy often takes that sin-tainted track, but God isn't like a jealous girlfriend who won't even let you talk to other girls.

God has a heart that wants to keep you entirely to himself **because he knows that is the only way that you and I can be saved.**

God looks at you struggling to survive in a world ruined by sin. He looks at your past, all of the painful memories of broken bones and hearts and dreams; he looks at your present so filled with loneliness, frustration, depression, anxiety, doubt, and fear; he looks at your future how everything you have and hold is going to go the way of all the earth, including your own life and the sadness that will bring...

God looks at you struggling with a heart so ruined by sin. He looks at your past, all of the times you looked more like a stubborn Israelite than a faithful Christian; he looks at your present, so filled examples of you ignoring the warning he so clearly spells out for you in his Bible; he looks at your future, how even as a Christian, the good you want to do, you don't, and the bad you know you shouldn't do, that you keep on doing...

God looks at you and he knows in his heart of hearts that the only way you can be saved from this world, the only way you can be saved from yourself is if he takes you and claims you as his own, is if he takes you and makes you his prized possession – the thing he loves more than anything, the thing he would sacrifice his life to save.

That is what God means when he calls himself jealous. And yeah, sometimes his intense desire to save you by keeping you all for himself leads him to be angry when you start acting like the Israelites but that is not some petty, selfish jealousy. It is the fiercely protective jealousy of your Father who loves you more than anything.

Moms, dads, if you were putting your kids laundry away and you found the proverbial drug stash in the sock drawer, are you going to be angry? Are you going to be want to cut your kid off from whomever sold him those drugs and introduced him to those drugs? Of course you are! Not because you are petty and selfish, but because your heart wants what is best for your child.

That is the jealous heart of your God in 1 Corinthians 10. This is the God who wants to keep you all to himself not out of petty selfishness but out of his deep desire to save you – to give you not only your daily bread, but through the Bread of Life to save you from sin in all its forms (including, and especially, the sins that come from your own heart).

So, Paul's encouragement is this: don't be ignorant of your jealous God's heart. Learn from the OT Israelites, learn from your God about his jealousy, and how pushing his jealousy never ends well. So that when you are tempted you can remember not only the seriousness of God's anger toward sin, but also that your God is faithful, and in that temptation and through that temptation he will provide for you because he wants you all to himself – that's just the amazing Jealous love his heart has for you.

So tomorrow morning I hope you hear it: not only hear the dump truck of your God backing into your drive way, I hope you also hear the angry sounding voice of your God from your upstairs bedroom – he's found the drug stash of the sins of your heart, he wants you to know how much that upsets him because he loves you and he wants you all to himself – that's how much he loves you.

Amen.