

Purpose In The Wilderness

Exodus 15:22-27

Has anyone here ever been to some place that you would consider to be a promised land? It usually involves beaches, or a nice comfy hotel room, warm weather, peace and quiet and all the niceties of life...What we're going to talk about this morning is the opposite of that.

This morning, we are going to continue topic from last week on wilderness living and trusting in God in the wilderness of our lives.

The Israelites were walking into this landscape (photo) and I imagine this wouldn't make anyone's top 10 vacation destinations.

What is wilderness?

Wilderness: An unsettled, uncultivated region, a large wild tract of land covered with dense vegetation or forests, an extensive area, such as a desert or ocean, that is barren or empty; a waste.

God lead them out here for a very specific purpose...we talked about this last week.

- After ten plagues and a mighty deliverance at the red sea the people have been brought into the wilderness
- they encamp at Marah
- they moved from Marah to Elim
- they moved from Elim to Dophkah
- They moved from Dophkah to Alush
- and from Alush to Rephidim

...they were lead them out here for a very specific purpose, which was more than just having to go that way to get to the Promised Land.

This was going to be a challenging time for Moses and this huge mass of people.

God was instilling principles in their lives that they were going to need in order to take hold of their destiny.

Now you may not like the truth of this message, but the simple fact of the matter is that we need wilderness experiences.

You may be in a wilderness season right now.

What is in the wilderness? Nothing! There is a reason why God takes us into wilderness seasons in our lives and it's vital for our futures.

1) Wilderness tests convictions (15:22-27)

The nation of Israel was setting out to claim a promise that was made hundreds of years before to their ancestor Abraham.

The years of slavery were over and now God needed to get Egypt and slavery mentality out of their systems.

This was not going to be an easy process, and it became blatantly obvious as soon as the first little hick-up happened at Marah (bad water).

The first part of Exodus 15 is this wonderful song of God's greatness (*lets read it*), but when things don't go as they planned they turn quickly.

They were now a Theocracy, a form of government where God is the supreme leader.

These people were going to have to learn to trust in God for everything, not in their old rulers or in their own wisdom.

God can only do this in circumstances that are out of our control, which they didn't like very much...But, what they didn't know, and God did, was that Elim (12 fresh springs) was just around the corner.

When you begin the journey of faith, circumstances will arise that are out of your control.

It is not something we enjoy, but it is the only way God can test your newfound convictions. Jesus claims to be all-sufficient and that He will

never leave us nor forsake us, but the only way to be convinced of this is to be in a position where He must be everything for you and when He is all you have to hang on to.

Who likes being in that place? Do you see why it's critical for us to go through these times? How can we preach and share this stuff with any kind of conviction if we've never lived it? This is when things go from our heads to our hearts, the old is made new!

2) Wilderness builds faith (16:1-6)

As this nation of people moved through the wilderness, they saw things that were truly miraculous.

They left Elim and became very hungry and grumbled once more to God. By the next day manna and quail were falling from the sky to feed over a million people.

This became a daily occurrence.

They later saw water come from a rock near Sinai as God again supplied the needs of the people in the midst of a desert.

Over and over again, God showed himself to be faithful in impossible circumstances.

He was able to sustain and keep this vast group of people.

As these things were happening God was instilling in them things they would need when taking the Promised Land.

Things like:

- the tabernacle
- the Ark of the Covenant
- the promise of His continual presence
- the laws
- authority structures

- and the 10 commandments

These things were all given and learned in the wilderness, not the Promised Land.

In times of challenge God builds within us faith in His ability to do exactly what He promises to do, even in the most impossible circumstances.

This is where we learn about God's perfect timing and how it has nothing to do with our own agendas and timelines, but rather, how He answers and when He answers it is perfect.

During this time we gain our own stories of His greatness that we can share to others.

As we wait on Him and don't fall back into our old pathways, we have principles woven into our lives that we will need in other seasons

³ But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. ⁴ We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance. (2 Thess. 3:3-5).

This is when God sets within our hearts His Word, much like we see in the life of Christ before He went into ministry.

God was preparing Him for a great work and that is what he wants to do with you as well.

Your belief will always be stronger coming out of a wilderness than when you went in.

3) Wilderness forges warriors (Num. 14:20-24)

What the Israelites needed to understand was that the 2 years they spent in the wilderness was to prepare them to take the land that God had promised them.

They should have been people of great conviction and unwavering faith having been forged in the wilderness to be an unstoppable army of God's people.

Joshua and Caleb were 2 such men full of faith and confidence in God's ability to do anything, defeat any foe.

Don't you find it almost unbelievable that the Israelites would not have an unshakable belief in God, but they didn't.

They had not learned from their years in the wilderness and there were severe consequences.

They chose to wander in fear instead of experiencing the awesome promises of God unfold before them.

God wants us to come out of wilderness experiences ready to accomplish His great plans.

All of the things He teaches us are to re-enforce your faith and convictions in preparation to do some serious damage in taking your God-given destiny.

³ Not only so, but we^[c] also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

Romans 5:3-5 says that it is all for a purpose and if we submit to his direction then we will have overwhelming victory.

Forging is a forming or making process through concentrated effort.

In the wilderness God is concentrating on making you into an influencer, an ambassador, a warrior for Christ.

Yet so many turn from their destiny in fear and disbelief not realizing the devastating consequences of their actions.

You may have traded your promised land for the desert, never to return to that opportunity again! Are you ready to march forward as warriors?

Conclusion

The desolate and trying wilderness is a place God uses in our lives to test our convictions, build our faith and forges us into warriors for the Lord.

It is not the Promised Land, it is not the place God wants you to stay, it is a necessary place of preparation.

We have so many things to unlearn about how we used to do things, old wisdom we used to rely on and God wants to remake you into something new, something strong, and something fearless.

Everyone wants the end product, but most people don't want to go on the journey to get there.

Can I encourage you this morning to stay the course.

If you are experiencing a wilderness time in your life where you feel like everything is a struggle and you're not enjoying the fruit of the Promised Land, don't worry; God is preparing you for something.

You have not been abandoned. You have not been forgotten.

God is testing your convictions; do you really trust Him with your life?

God is building your faith, do you really believe that God can and will come good on His promises and that you have a destiny?

God is forging a warrior, are you growing in character, endurance and perseverance?

Don't resist the wilderness; embrace it. Wilderness is for everyone!

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your

*faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **James 1:2-4***