

Joining Jesus in the Wilderness

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 Title: Preparing for the Journey into the Wilderness
 Text: Luke 4:1-15 (Key verses: 1, 2, 13-15)
 Theme: “For forty days, being tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:2)

Introduction:

This is our second installment of “When Winter Comes.” As God permits I would like us to visit our relationship with God twice a year.

Our present study seeks to place the emphasis on our relationship with God. Most relationships are things that we take for granted. We simply assume it will always be there so we do not work at cultivating them.

ILLUSTRATION:

I am reminded of the couple who began dating and always sat tight against each other even when they were in the car. Once they got married and as the years passed the distance between them grew. After many years while taking a trip in their car the husband was driving and the wife was sitting in the passenger seat. She was lamenting the fact that they were no longer snuggled up against each other when driving and the husband’s response was, “I didn’t move.”

This is no less true when we think of our relationship with God. God has not moved in His relationship to us, but perhaps we have moved from keeping Him first and foremost in our mind’s eyes. The most important relationship you have is the one you have with God. Although nothing can destroy it, you can be ignoring it and thus not fully enjoy everything that is yours in Christ right now.

The wilderness we are about to enter into is a wilderness of our own choosing. God works in us so that we willingly go to the desert. **It is not the wilderness of sin or its consequences.** It is a wilderness that God is leading us to journey in.

Some would place such activity as we are about to consider as a spiritual discipline. What is a spiritual discipline?

“Spiritual disciplines help to keep our [focus on God]. But no discipline is able to create or start one's relationship with God. Nothing we do can do that; Christ did it already. No discipline can earn us heavenly brownie points, because there are no such brownie points to earn. No discipline gives us even the briefest moment of escape from our broken nature. No discipline can make us more valuable as persons, or make us inherently more of a leader. Your life

may go smoother because of it, but it may get much rougher, and neither is really the point of it.” <http://www.spirithome.com/spirdisc.html>

How are we to view our wilderness moments? During our present study I would like us to join Jesus in the wilderness. I am going to use the religious calendar of the “Christian” church at large to guide us in our thinking during our journey into the grace of God.

Although we are not accustomed to following a religious calendar, the religious calendar marks March 1, 2006 as Ash Wednesday. This begins a time called Lent. Lent is a 40 day period culminating with Easter. It has historically been set aside by the church at large to prepare the people of God to enter into the sufferings of Jesus Christ in preparation for Easter Sunday. Traditionally, Lent is a season of grief that necessarily ends with a great celebration of Easter, it is known in Eastern Orthodox circles as the season of “Bright Sadness.” For those of us who grew up in certain religious systems Lent was always marked by something that we would give up and then give over to God as an expression of our love for the Lord.

Somewhere along the way the entire idea of Lent became very much man centered and was looked upon as a means of earning favor or meriting salvation from God. Such thinking twists something that can be good into something that becomes damnable. It is not what is done, but why it is done that can make it spiritually tragic.

Yet is there an idea inside of such religious expressions that can assist us in our pursuit of Christ? I do believe so. By considering this present study it is my prayer that our awareness of God in our lives will be heightened.

I recognize that I open myself up to being misunderstood by what I am beginning to teach. It is possible that I will be misunderstood.

ILLUSTRATION:

Misunderstanding terms

One reason the Armed Services have trouble operating jointly is that they don't speak the same language.

For example, if you told Navy personnel to "secure a building," they would turn off the lights and lock the doors.

Army personnel would occupy the building so no one could enter.

Marines would assault the building, capture it, and defend it with suppressive fire and close combat.

The Air Force, on the other hand, would take out a three-year lease with an option to buy.

If I did not believe that the value far outweighs the risks I would not be attempting to instruct us in this area. It is an area that God has been working in my life for the last several years and I trust that He is sharpening my thinking as we journey together in our present study.

As we approach the Passion Week of Christ I would like us to think about preparing ourselves for it.

- This preparation is **first** through **mind-renewal**. We must reflect on truth; the truth about Christ and His redemptive activity.
- **Secondly**, to transfer this truth into our daily life expressions we must think of tangible activities that we can engage in for the purpose of seeing Jesus as enough (JIE).

We must see the cross and His resurrection as life altering, guiding us in our daily decision making. Does Jesus matter? For the next several weeks I want us to embrace Paul's thought when he said in Philippians 3:10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

It is my prayer that during this time in our study God would grant to us a vision of His Son that would bring hope, healing, and wholeness to those areas in our lives where sin has gained a foothold and where its wounds and scars are controlling and destroying relationships.

I would like us to consider the wilderness temptation of Jesus Christ. There are questions we will attempt to answer: "Why the wilderness? What is the wilderness?" Initially there are three observations about the wilderness.

- **The wilderness stands as a time of preparation.**

Its intent was to show who He was. It was a provoking, a challenge, and an accusation. Was He whom He claimed to be? The confrontation was intentional and direct. It is placed at the beginning of his ministry to probe the nature of the one sent.

"Jesus shows before his ministry begins that his trust and obedience are in his Father." (Baker Commentary on the Bible, "Luke," Thomas R. Schreiner, 810)

- **The wilderness is a time of separation.**

The wilderness allows us to strip away the secondary and see once more the primary. It allows the power of the cross and the sufficiency of the Trinity to power their way back into our lives. Although the wilderness is a time of difficulty it can also be a gateway into the blessing of God that has been secured for His people in the indwelling Holy Spirit and the cross work. The wilderness provides a platform for the power of the cross to beam its way into our daily lives.

But we are to be forewarned.

▪ **The wilderness is also a time of temptation.**

The wilderness shows us what we are. Our weakness comes to the surface, but it is during this time that we must not lose sight of Paul's triumphant declaration in 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.

⁹ And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

It is while we are weak that we can begin to see the power of God. So let us begin this journey in preparation for our Lord's Passion Week and powerful resurrection. Let us ask Him to show us more clearly who He is, what He has done, and who we now are in Him.

The purpose of the wilderness is not for us to see how strong we are, but for us to see how strong He is. The wilderness is not about us, but about Him. We would be amiss if we thought that Jesus in the wilderness was a bad thing. His removal from comfort was a good thing. The temptation He faced at the hands of the devil was orchestrated by God. We cannot forget that it was the Holy Spirit that led Him into the wilderness. God is in our deserts.

Before we consider joining Jesus in the wilderness it is important that we note seven fundamental truths concerning our relationship with God in Christ.

I. Preparing for the journey into the wilderness

No matter why we chose the wilderness or how pitiful our performance might be in the wilderness there are seven fundamental truths that must be held as we prepare ourselves to journey with Jesus in the wilderness.

- A. We are not working from deficiency, but from abundance (John 10:10, Col. 2:10).

John 10:10 "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Col. 2: 10 "and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."

The purpose of the wilderness is to remove clutter and increase clarity. It is not to gain what is lacking, but to reflect on what has been provided.

- B. We can never undo by our actions what God has done through His (John 19:30).

John 19:30 “therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”

The wilderness is for our enjoyment. Whether we go into the wilderness or not or once entering in we fail, we can never undo what God has done.

- C. What we receive by grace, we cannot maintain by works (Gal. 3:3).

Gal. 3:3 “are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

The wilderness does not secure or sustain. The wilderness celebrates and commemorates. It reflects on what God has done, is doing, and will do.

- D. Our greatest strength is our weakness, and our greatest boast is His cross (2 Cor. 12:9).

2 Cor. 12:9 “and He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

The wilderness is a reminder that all we need in life we already have in Christ.

- E. We are not working for our victory we are working from His (Rom. 8:37).

Rom. 8:37 “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”

The wilderness is a time to reflect on the magnitude of His cross-work in behalf of His people. The wilderness allows us to see that it has been and always will be about Him.

- F. Position changes performance, but performance can never alter one’s position (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

2 Cor. 5:17-21 “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on

behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

It is because of His cross-work and resurrection that we can invite the wilderness as a time when we might see Him with greater clarity.

G. What we once were in Adam, we no longer are, but still have (Gal. 2:20, Col. 3:5).

Gal. 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Col. 3:5 “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

The wilderness can remind us that our greatest enemy this side of heaven is always within us. Consider the language of James 1:13-15

James 1:13-15 “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But **each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.** ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

Let us go to the wilderness with Jesus and see it as a time of preparation, separation, and potential temptation. But let us enter the wilderness knowing that our relationship with God is settled.