

To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer

Prayer Study #324

THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Matthew 4:1

This is one of the most astonishing scriptures in the Word of God to me. Here the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness specifically to be tempted by the devil. J. Vernon McGee writes of this verse: “*The word “tempt” has a twofold meaning: 1. “Incite or entice to evil; seduce.” There is something in each of us which causes us to yield to evil. This was not true of Jesus. “...the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me” John 14:30. He was “...holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners...”(Hebrews 7:26). So the temptation of Jesus had to be different from that which would cause me to fall, in that it needed to be a much greater temptation. 2. “Test.” God does not tempt men with evil according to James 1:13. Yet, we are told “...God did tempt Abraham...”(Genesis 22:1). This means that God was testing the faith of Abraham. Jesus is now to be tested. Could Jesus have fallen? I want to answer that with an emphatic NO! He could not have fallen. If Jesus could have fallen, then you and I do not have a sure Savior at all. Perhaps you are saying, “Well then, if Jesus could not have fallen, was His temptation a legitimate and genuine temptation? May I say to you that His temptation was much greater than any that you and I have ever had....Every genuine diamond is tested to show that it is not a phony. In a similar way, the Lord Jesus Christ was tested to demonstrate that He was exactly who He claimed to be.”*

William Barclay tell us, “*All three gospel writers seem to stress the immediacy with which the temptations followed the baptism of Jesus. It is one of the truths of life that after every great moment, there comes a moment of reaction. We will do well to be specifically on our guard whenever life has brought us to the heights, for it is just then that we are in greatest danger of the depths.*” Barclay believes that the temptation of Christ in the wilderness was an inner struggle that went on in Jesus’ own heart and mind and soul. He bases this on the fact that there is no mountain from which all the kingdoms of the earth could be seen. He says, “*It is through our inmost*

thoughts and desires that the tempter comes to us. His attack is launched in our own minds. It is true that the attack can be so real that we almost see the devil.” Barclay also says that we need to realize that this is not the only time that the tempter came to Jesus. Satan once spoke through Peter who tried to convince Jesus not to take the way of the cross, and again at Gethsemane, to use only two examples. Barclay writes, *“In the Christian warfare, there is no release. Sometimes people grow worried because they think that they should reach a stage when they are beyond temptation, a stage when the power of the tempter is forever broken. Jesus never reached that stage. From the beginning to the end of the day, He had to fight His own battle against temptation; that is why he can help us to fight ours.”*

“We must always remember that again and again we are tempted through our gifts. It is the grim fact of temptation that it is just where we are strongest that we must be forever on the watch.”

Often we say or at least imply the lie to nonbelievers that all their problems will disappear if they invite Jesus into their hearts. Thus, when they do accept Christ, they are quickly discouraged by the spiritual warfare that they soon find themselves engaged in. Since Jesus is the Pattern Son, we must realize that sometimes the Holy Spirit takes us to a wilderness place, and there we are tempted by the kingdom of darkness. The greater filling of the Spirit and the greater revelation we have, the greater is the attack of the enemy against us and the more time we will spend in the wilderness, for it is the wilderness where we are tried and tested, where our characters are perfected, and where we lose our attraction to the world and to fleshly things. The wilderness is the place for the believer to put God in exclusive control of your life. It is the place where we learn to trust Him, no matter what circumstances we face. It is the place where the Lord often reveals the purpose of our lives. And it is a place where we are equipped for greater service to the Lord.

Most of our Biblical heroes had a wilderness experience. Abraham went to the wilderness out of obedience to the Lord. Moses, fearful for his life, went to the wilderness to run and hide. He spent the first 40 years of his life in the Pharaoh’s court being a worldly somebody. He spent the next 40 years of his life on the back side of the desert being a nobody. It was only then that he was able to spend the finally forty years of his life being the great deliverer and law giver to the Hebrew children. David fled to the wilderness because Saul was trying to kill him. Elijah went to the wilderness out of fear of Jezebel, and it was here that he prayed to die. Paul spent years in the wilderness most probably learning the deep things of God. Jesus Himself went to the wilderness as a place to be tested to show for all

eternity that He indeed was the Son of God and to mark the beginning of His ministry.

No doubt that all of you will have a wilderness experience. If you have walked with the Lord very long, you probably already have had wilderness experiences, and some of you are currently walking in the wilderness. If you are there, remember that it is not a time to murmur and complain against the Lord. You must thank, praise, worship and honor God in the wilderness. Remember to speak His word and that you are alone with God in the midst of your hardships. He has not forgotten you and has promised in His word that He know you even in the midst of the wilderness: **Hosea 13:5**-*I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. To know* in the Old Testament is a very intimate term and in this case probably alludes to being a familiar friend to someone.

Sometimes the wilderness is where the Lord has to take you to get you alone with Him, and sometimes it is a place of safety and refuge as in **Revelation 12:1-6**:

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothes with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven; behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days. The woman represents the Body of Christ. The Child is Jesus. The dragon is Satan.

Again the key to coming out of the wilderness is praise and worship and is speaking God's Word, especially as the accuser of the brethren taunts and torments you. He cannot overcome the blood of the Lamb and the Word of our testimony which is the Scripture. **Revelation 12:11**-*And they overcame him [the accuser of the brethren] by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

GIVE THEM ALL TO JESUS
Phil Johnson and Bob Benson Sr.

Are you tired of chasing pretty rainbows?
Are you tired of spinning round and round?
Wrap-up all the shattered dreams of your life
And at the feet of Jesus lay them down.

He never said you'd only see sunshine.
He never said there'd be no rain.
He only promised a heartful of singing
About the very things that once brought pain.

CHORUS

Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus
Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, broken toys
Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus
And He will turn your sorrow into joy.