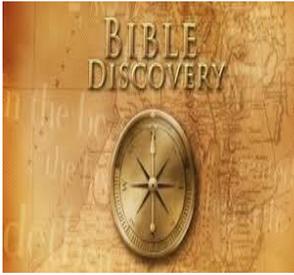


February 22, 2015

Mark 1:12-15

A Time of Learning



Think of all the trivial things in your life which shift your focus away from God. The young seem to dedicate more time sending text messages or posting status updates than seeking God; while we who're more mature are either on the phone, watching TV or meeting for coffee, more than in prayer and time with God. So perhaps you expect me to ask if there's something you're ready to give up during Lent. That's the usual emphasis preparing to celebrate the passion of our Lord who gave His life that we might have life with God.

Yet though we fast and pray; though we surrender our favourite diet; though we text less, watch TV less - or not - we can't live or engage life in meaningful ways without experiencing wilderness moments - often without even trying. Wilderness moments come when we feel we're tested beyond our limits, in over our head, often described in wilderness terms as being *dry, desolate, lonely, trying, difficult, agonizing*. We speak of *hunger, thirst, longing*. That's why for our first Sunday in Lent we're considering finding Jesus in the wilderness where, we're told, He was tempted in every way just as we are yet was without sin.

Remember Jesus' wilderness time occurred "immediately" following his baptism where He received affirmation of His Father: "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased*" [Mark 1:11]. It occurred just when you'd have thought everything for Jesus was going to be great - He'd usher in His Father's kingdom, save people from their sins, be received as the long-awaited Messiah - instead He's in the wilderness - suffering, hungry, lonely, with the devil literally on his back. Can you relate? Wilderness time is a part of our lives too!

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I want us to learn from Jesus' example the difference between being tempted and sinning. Temptation's all around us as the enemy works to weaken our defences when we're at our lowest, most vulnerable moments. Jesus was in the desert for forty days without food when Satan told Him to have the stones turned into bread. While Jesus could do just that, He understood to do so was to rely on direction from the enemy and to turn His back on His Father. When we're tempted - often with seemingly harmless acts - do we consider the harm to our relationships, to ourselves, to our relationship with our Heavenly Father?

Although, we're often tempted we must keep in mind we need not fall into sin. God gives us a way out. Yet we do sin even knowing, "*everyone who sins is a slave to sin*" [John 8:34], that "*the pleasures of sin is for a short time*" [Hebrews 11:25], that "*in fact, sin is lawlessness*" [1 John 3:4]. In fact Paul tells us we've all sinned and come up short on the measuring stick when measured against our Lord, God. When we're in these wilderness moments, Satan plays a real number on us convincing us we've no way out - but we do - His name is Jesus! Ever see the enemy scramble when you dare to invoke the name of Jesus? The power in the name is beyond anything Satan can conquer. "Jesus - Jesus - Jesus" works to give you all the strength and power you need to overcome temptation. So are we able, indeed, are we willing, to recognize such wilderness times are also times for learning? They're times for finding strength and perseverance in Christ; discovering what He has for you. Let me use a cute e-mail providing light-hearted pearls of wisdom on what young children have learned about life.

- "You can't trust dogs to watch your food for you."
- "Don't sneeze when somebody is cutting your hair."
- "You can't hide a piece of broccoli in a glass of milk."
- "When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair."

- “No matter how hard you try you cannot baptize a cat.”

These examples of experiences we call “**learning the hard way.**” That’s also what it’s like during our hard times in the wilderness. A lot is learned in the wilderness, but one thing stands out. Our wildernesses are places for learning about priorities—what really matters in our lives. We learn life presents us many options—a myriad of ways to use our resources, our time, our abilities, but without a clear sense of what’s important, we end up finding we’ve not taken care of what matters most having merely enjoyed pleasure for a fleeting moment.

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Jesus’ time in the wilderness—coming just before He began his public ministry—was a time for sorting out what mattered most - getting clear on God’s will for his life. Matthew and Luke tell us Jesus was tempted by material needs, fame, and power – all of which would deviate Him from his mission, would place his trust away from God. Little wonder Jesus would later teach, “*Do not worry saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ Your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.*” [Matthew 6:32-33] If we would follow Jesus into the wilderness, we’ll see how our own wilderness time, as painful as wilderness experiences are, is where we find spiritual growth; is an important time of testing values, offer times of learning about ourselves, about God; discovering what holds us back from embracing all the Father has for us, and making decisions about our life’s priorities. Without a time of stocktaking and learning—a product of our wilderness experiences—life just goes along without much thought or direction.

This year, as you move through this Lenten season, instead of ceremonial sacrifices, decide to include something special in your daily routine - giving up chocolate for 40 days may be great, but why not do something really positive? Go ahead and resolve to volunteer your time; build deeper bonds with your family, set aside your purchase on one coffee a day, donating to a worthy cause. Certainly include devotions as another great way to move through the wilderness experience of Lent. Indeed, engage in prayer, talk with God, read His Word for direction God intends for your life; choose a particular book of the Bible to read during Lent spending more time focused on truly seeking God and following Him; learn how you can embody God’s plan through your everyday life.

But foremost, take time for self-examination and reflection. While reading God’s Word, interceding in prayer, seeking ways to serve others, let God speak to you to reveal baggage you’re keeping. Use this wilderness moment, as you step out of the busyness of life, reflecting on your dependence of God’s mercy, rediscovering the depth of His grace, deepening your understanding of faith; and consider acceptance of Christ’s message for your life.

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When Jesus went into the wilderness, rather than trapped by circumstance, Jesus knew exactly where He was going and what He’d encounter. Jesus chose to pursue His Father’s will; to learn as He prepared for days of ministry ahead, to set priorities, to affirm His trust in God. So too as we examine what’s important for us, learn to use our time wisely we ask, “What’s our end game?” In closing, let me share a story to demonstrate what I mean...

A businessman visited a coastal village where he noticed a boat with just one fisherman pulling up to the dock. Inside the small boat were several large yellow-fin tuna. He complimented the fisherman on the fish asking how long it took to catch them. “Only a little while,” the fisherman replied. The business responded, “Why didn’t you stay out longer and catch more fish?” Again the fisherman replied, “I’ve enough to support my family’s needs.” Then the businessman asked, “What do you do with the rest of your time?” The fisherman said, “*I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife, and stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my friends. I’ve a full and busy life.*”

The businessman scoffed, “I’ve a Harvard MBA. You should spend more time fishing, buy a bigger boat with the proceeds, from which you’d buy several boats, eventually owning a whole fleet. You then sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You’d control the product, processing, and distribution. Of course you need to leave this small village moving to Mexico City, then LA; eventually New York City where

you'd run your expanding enterprise." The fisherman asked, "How long will this take?" The MBA replied, "15-20 years." "Then what?" the fisherman asked. The American laughed, "That's the best part. When time's right, you announce an initial public offering selling your company stock publicly and make millions."

"Millions?" the fisherman asked. "Then what?" The American replied, "Then you retire; move to a small coastal fishing village. There you sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a siesta with your wife, and stroll to the village in the evenings where you sip wine and play guitar with your friends." **Really?**

What's most important to you?

Where's your life headed? These are good wilderness questions! Temptations can come in many forms. They're not always dressed in scarlet, wearing chocolate frosting or established as forbidden by our society. Many times they're what interfere with the will of our Father for us. They keep us from finding contentment and happiness with Jesus. Away from the distractions, spending time – just you and Jesus! Here are some other good wilderness questions for you to ask...

- "What's God calling you to do with your life?" (You don't want to be a servant who squanders gifts given you by God.)
- "What are the resources He's provided you with to serve Him?" (He never calls but that He also equips.)
- "What in your life have you taken for granted?" (Everything we have from God is a blessing but do we recognize such gifts?)

Spending time to learn from the Lord will help you discover the answers to these compelling questions and will give you renewed direction in your life. So, are you ready to go camping in the wilderness? If you would like to speak to someone about what you have read, or would like to discuss what we're talking about in having the Lord answer questions for your life, please give me a call at 1-519-317-8659 or email to office.mbbc@explornet.com.



Blessings,

Pastor Dave