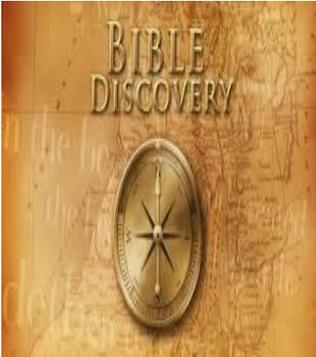


1 Mar 15

2 Corinthians 4:8-11

A Time of Challenge



We began our Lenten season journey last week, invited to join following Jesus through wilderness moments. I asked if you were ready to go camping in the wilderness. Unlike Jesus who took nothing, we're often loaded down in our wilderness experiences – loaded down with challenges of spiritual *dryness, loneliness, and despair; heavily burdened when fear, disappointment, low self-esteem, and bitterness creep in.* We spoke of Satan meeting Jesus in the wilderness tempting him in every way just as you and I are tempted – yet Jesus did not succumb to sin. Yet there's yet another encounter we find when we journey with Jesus in the wilderness even as we encounter temptation. There were wild and dangerous beasts in the wilderness with Jesus. And so I must ask:

“Do we, during our wilderness moments, encounter wild beasts?”

Look just ahead of you and you'll see fear crouching in the brush nearby, ready to pounce and strangle; over there amongst those rocks is temptation slithering around just waiting opportunity to strike while despair sweeps in ever narrowing circles overhead, just waiting to land and devour. Yes, we've wild beasts of our own in our wilderness moments! Our faith, our values, our trust in God, what we believe – all is tested in the wilderness as we face our times of challenge. When we find ourselves in the wilderness, we're more susceptible to the power of temptation through the schemes of the enemy who prowls about seeking whom he may devour.

When we find ourselves experiencing wilderness moments, we're tempted to stray from our values we know to be true, the Saviour whom we trust to see us through. That's because Satan wants to defeat us, to tear us away from our Heavenly Father. Our challenge is to remain true to what we know is true, living our lives in a way that demonstrates our belief.

In our wilderness moments we're tempted to stray from values we know to be true.

Easier said than done! It seems that when we're experiencing wilderness moments rather than believing in and seeking Jesus, we're bombarded not only by questions but by terrible solutions...

- ✚ **Take** the easy way out;
- ✚ **Believe** you don't deserve what you're going through;
- ✚ **Seek** to blame others,
- ✚ **Find** a quick escape.

If we don't think of these on our own – turn on the TV or glance at a magazine where every advertisement, program or article is determined to advise us on how we should live without disappointment, how we deserve the best of everything, how our lives should be perfect. The challenge is we must listen to our life-giving God rather than radio, television, or the Internet, each telling us what gives meaning and purpose to life, what principles should guide our life. Paul inferred

our relationship to Jesus in the midst of the wilderness as he spoke of *“always carrying around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”*

What value do you place on Jesus’ love for you as he gave his life so that you could not only live but live victoriously?

I realize with all the voices, it’s increasingly difficult to discern good from evil. We arm ourselves against the evil one portrayed as ugly with a scary voice yet in reality, the evil one doesn’t come with pointy tails, horns, cloven hooves, or a menacing scowl but neither is he what you see portrayed today on TV as an angel to help you. Rather, while remembering Satan was once an angel of light – “Lucifer” means beautiful - we know evil presents itself by twisting what’s good, even life-fulfilling, into something evil and destructive of life. Money, power, influence, sex, security, winning, fame — nothing evil in itself yet all are twisted, perverted, to become evil and destructive when left in the hands of Satan.

It’s easy at those times to do what’s suggested – and in the end blame God. Consider Adam when God approaches him following the sin of Adam and Eve as they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil – his first recourse was to blame God - *“for the woman you gave me.”* We haven’t changed a whole lot have we?

The challenge is to move through the struggle and take the hard, narrow way!

The challenge is to move through the struggle and take the hard, narrow way. The challenge is to listen to the words of Jesus who instructs us how to live our lives, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”* [Matthew 7:13-14]. The right way, the way to life, is often the hard and narrow way. Our challenge is to persevere, move through the struggle, letting the Lord lead us so we make the hard choice, following the narrow road and remain with God.

The Apostle recognizes that those of us who’ve been saved because of God’s rich mercy through the sacrifice of Christ, *“we who are alive, are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake.”* The life of Jesus is the life of renewed mankind, *“created in righteousness and true holiness”* [Ephesians 4:24]. He encourages us to see the purpose of sufferings now as manifesting our Lord in and through our circumstances. In his commentary on these verses, Matthew Henry suggests,

“Believers may be forsaken of their friends, as well as persecuted by enemies; but their God will never leave them nor forsake them. There may be fears within, as well as fightings without; yet we are not destroyed.”

The truth is we can persevere and overcome in the midst of any and all wilderness moments through the strength and presence of Jesus. We have His Word on it. He calls us to do this in order that in all things the same kind of living which characterized the Lord Jesus might be manifested in us. As believers we’re asked to pursue a life in Christ such that there might be the same self-denial; the same readiness to suffer; the same patience in trials; the same meekness, gentleness, zeal, love to God, and love to people demonstrated by the Lord Jesus. ***That is our greatest challenge!***

Meeting challenges in the wilderness in this way helps prepare us for meeting the challenge the next time – and there will be a next time. We struggle with our temptations and out of that struggle we develop Godly character. James 1:2-4 tells readers, *“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”* Perseverance is the key to meeting the challenges of wilderness moments.

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If we're willing to turn our eyes upon Jesus, looking full into His wonderful face, relying on His strength, His direction, His presence in our lives to endure our wilderness experiences, then we're truly free from the sullen presence of sin. We'll live in the assurance Jesus has indeed conquered Satan, death has been vanquished, we've gained the victory - because Jesus is our Lord!

Only then will we see walking with Jesus builds character, offering us guidance and strength as we pursue the opportunity to learn about ourselves even as we consider the deep consequence of yielding to temptation. We live in victory, remaining free from the stain, the tears, the pain, the suffering which is the immediate consequence of falling into sin and free from eternal separation from our Heavenly Father which is our ultimate cost.

Will we this Lenten season meet the challenge of wilderness moments by meeting with God daily, placing our focus on Jesus first and letting our lives play out in His hands? Will we go with Jesus to the garden and pray, *“Not my will, but thine be done, O Lord”* and trust in Him to carry us through our days? One thing I know, Jesus spent many days in prayer and meditation with His Heavenly Father long before the night of betrayal and the advent of the cross so that Jesus was thoroughly acquainted with the will and way of God for his life. As we meet God daily - long before the wilderness moments come our way, we not only prepare for the challenges of the wilderness, we're equipped to overcome temptation, and live victorious in lives for God and in the process we discover that instead of being preoccupied with our problems, we fill our days praising the Lord for His blessings!

***Will we go with Jesus to the
garden and pray...***



***“Not my will, but thine be
done, O Lord”***

For support and encouragement, give us a call at 519-317-8659 or send us an email to office.mbbc@xplor.net. We'd love to hear from you and pray with you.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave