

God With Us? Msg 2  
In The Wilderness  
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Eagle Rock Baptist Church  
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It's great to be with you as we continue our series . . . God With Us . . .  
And, what we're doing in this series is we're letting a text from the New Testament be an anchor for us.

As followers of Christ, we're looking at one of the most important verses, as it relates to the presence of God in our lives.

The verse is found in Matthew 1:23 and it says . . .

***“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” Matthew 1:23***

Last week we looked at how we experience the presence of God in the valley.

If you were with us we talked about the truth that

**We may Enjoy God on the mountaintops, but we get to Know Him Intimately in the valleys.**

Today what I want to do is I want to talk about another metaphor from Scripture, this time not the Valley but the Wilderness

**((The Wilderness & Observations About The Wilderness))**

I want us to look at how we experience God's presence in the wilderness.

Words translated as “wilderness” occur nearly 300 times in the Bible.

Read through your Bible and you'll discover a couple of things about the wilderness.

**Wilderness times OFTEN follow Mountaintop times**

Not ALWAYS but OFTEN, times in the wilderness occur on the heels of times on the Mountaintop

We're going to draw from three different Wilderness stories this morning . . .

Our Lord's experience in the Wilderness.

The Children of Israel in the Wilderness

And the Old Testament Prophet Elijah's experience in the wilderness.

In each of those cases, that time spent in the wilderness was immediately following some sort of mountaintop experience.

Another thing we'll see about the wilderness is that the wilderness is different from the Valley that we looked at last week because . . .

**Time spent in the wilderness usually Lasts a lot Longer.**

Living in California, when you think of Wilderness what you think of is very different from the Biblical picture of wilderness.

I did an image search this week for

**California Wilderness**

And what I found reminded me that we live in a state that has some beautiful areas.

If you've ever gone backpacking in the Sierras you know that you can see things there that you won't see elsewhere.

Things that are very picturesque.

**In the Bible,**

The wilderness is a barren place, a dry place, a desolate place a place where you feel very alone.

One of the images often found in the wilderness is **wandering** through the wilderness.

**We're wandering and we're wondering . . .**

We're **wondering** when in the world is this going to be over.

We're **wondering** are we ever going to get out of the wilderness.

Some of you right now, you might be in some type of a wilderness.

**You're stuck in this job**, and you're wondering, should I stay in this job.

Or, should I go back to school?

And then if I do go back to school I'll have to take on student loan debt.

But if I take on student loan debt and go back to school . . .

I may wind up with a better job.

**I'm kind of stuck in this wilderness place,**

Should I stay or should I do something different?

**I'm renting a house** and I wonder, should I buy a house, or should I continue to rent.

I'm not getting any equity by continuing to rent.

But if I buy a house I may get transferred, I just don't know.

And so you kind of feel stuck in this place.

**I'm dating some guy**, and he just won't ask me to marry him.

I dated him, I dated him, and I prayed and I prayed and I fasted and I fasted and fasted and he still didn't do it, he's just spends his time playing video games, should I stay with him?

Or should I go out with somebody else, you know.

But I invested all that time, it just kind of goes on and on and on and on.

**We often feel alone.**

**We feel lost.**

**We feel disoriented.**

We feel like nobody really understands what we're going through in the wilderness.

**What's so interesting to me is when you look at wilderness stories in the Bible, as I mentioned, they often follow mountaintop experiences.**

And that's exactly what happened with Jesus.

**((Mark 1:9-11))**

Mark's gospel tells us what happened.

Jesus had a mountaintop moment with God right after he was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

Heaven opened up, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

And his father verbally and publicly expresses his love and approval for his son, when God said,

***"This is my son, whom I love. With him I'm well pleased."***

It's a father saying I'm proud of the son.

It's a mountaintop experience, and then the next verse says. . .

***"The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness," Mark 1:12***

Where he was tempted, tested, attacked by the enemy for 40 days.

Mountaintop, followed by wilderness.

**Some of you, may be able to relate to that.**

Things were going great for you, but then suddenly everything changed.

Maybe out found out that **someone wasn't being honest with you.**

Suddenly you're in a wilderness.

**You thought your spouse was being faithful** and your spouse wasn't.

Now you're in the wilderness.

You're **in a financial wilderness.**

You're trying and trying and trying to get out of this time this debt, and you feel so desperate.

Whatever you do it doesn't seem to work.

**You've tried to tell people how you feel,** but they just don't seem to understand.

You feel alone, you feel spiritually dry, you feel desperate in the wilderness.

What I want to do today is show you one big thought that we'll come back to again and again that I pray would not just be true, but would be true to your spirit as you hear it and as you live it.

The big thought is this: your deepest need, as much as it hurts...

1. Your deepest need becomes a **Gift** when it drives you to **Depend** on God.

The children of Israel learned to depend on God during their time in the wilderness.

They learned to depend on God for food

For daily bread – called Manna.

Deuteronomy chapter 8 reflecting on their time of wilderness wandering says . . . .

***"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." Deuteronomy 8:2***

In their wilderness wandering they learned to depend on God **because God was all they had.**

They learned to depend on him for guidance as He led them with a **pillar of cloud by day,** and a **pillar of fire by night.** / / / /

There is a story from the Old Testament in 1 Kings 19 where **Elijah also learned to depend on God**

You're going to look at this in your Life Group this week, so I won't read through it, I'll just give you the overview.

The story I'm referring to is one in which Elijah the prophet, has a mountaintop experience.

This mountaintop experience happened on a literal mountain top, a place called Mount Carmel.

It was there that Elijah was involved in showdown with the false prophets of the false God Baal, and Elijah got to see God "**show up**" and "show off" in some amazing and miraculous ways.

Almost immediately after this, we see Elijah go from the mountaintop to the wilderness, where he's desperate, where he's depressed, where he feels all alone and scared for his life.

Again, to give you a little of the backstory, there was an **evil king named King Ahab**.

And King Ahab had an even **more evil wife named Jezebel**.

If you're wondering why when it comes to Biblical names . . .

If you're wondering why some names of individuals in the Bible are still in use today, like . . .

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

Paul and Timothy and James and Joshua

And yet it's rare to meet a girl today named Jezebel. . . .

Well, read her story and you'll understand.

King Ahab's evil wife Jezebel had heard about all the Elijah had done.

She had heard about his mountaintop experience in defeating the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, and she got so mad.

She got so mad that she essentially she said to her husband, look, if you can't do the job right, then let this woman do the job for you.

And that's kind of what she did, she says, send word to Elijah that "**May the gods strike me down and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed those prophets.**"

She threatened to kill Elijah.

Now understand, King Ahab had been coming after Elijah for years and years and years, but as soon as a woman got mad, Elijah got scared.

And watch this, now I'm going to show you, right in God's word.

She makes the threat, the king had been pursuing him for years, she makes the threat, and this is what the Bible says.

***"Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there." 1 Kings 19:3***

Let me pause for a moment, because when you just read the text you may not understand just how far this guy ran.

To travel from Mt. Carmel, to Beersheba. . .

And remember this was in the days before Uber and Lyft.

To go from Mt. Carmel to Beersheba is about 100 miles.

And Elijah made the trip on foot.

He runs about 100 miles to get away from this crazy, angry woman.

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.

When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went another day's journey.

He was just on the mountaintop, but where did he end up?

He ran into the **wilderness**, into the wilderness, where he's alone, where he's scared, where he's hurting, and where he's desperate.

He came to a broom bush, and sat down under it and prayed that he might die.

And then he said the words that so many of us have said or felt at some point in our lives.

***"I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died." 1 Kings 19:4***

Elijah had fought the good fight

He had run the race

He had faced the enemy with bravery.

But now he's at the end of his rope.

He's had enough.

He can't take anymore.

He's exhausted.

He's overwhelmed.

He's ready to quit!!!

In a group this size there are probably some of you can relate to him, because at some point you've said those very words that he said.

Again, to give you some background, Elijah, had prior to this seen God work in his life in some amazing ways.

He had stood up to the evil King Ahab and had prophesied, and called for a drought as a punishment to this king's sins.

And sure enough, God stopped the rain.

Well the king got mad at Elijah, so he sends all of his forces after Elijah.

Elijah hides for three years, and God **PROTECTS** him.

God miraculously feeds him through ravens from heaven.

Then God uses Elijah to raise the life of a dead boy.

This prophet stands down 850 false prophets of Baal, he calls down fire from heaven, God shoots fire from heaven, consumes the altar, then God destroys the false prophets.

Elijah eventually calls and asks God to make it rain.

He sees in the distance a cloud the size of a man's hand, and has the faith to believe that God is bringing the provision of rain, and God does.

This prophet experienced the **PROTECTION** of God, this prophet experienced the **PROVISION** of God, he knew very well the **PRESENCE** of God, he had experienced God's **POWER**, and then when one woman makes a threat, Elijah runs for his life.

And he's ready to die.

What he needed at this point more than anything was an encounter with the very real and very holy presence of God.

And that's what he found . . .

But not initially

He was tired and exhausted and worn out

And the first thing God gave him was rest.

God doesn't preach him a sermon

God doesn't give him a chapter of scripture to memorize

God doesn't say "Elijah, the mess you're in is your own fault."

He lets him take a nap.

And then an angel wakes him up and says "Elijah, time to eat."

And the angel prepared him some food.

What kind of food to an angel give you to eat?

Was it angel food cake?

Probably not.

It was fresh-baked bread

Baked over hot stones

Gluten free.

And then he let Elijah sleep some more.

And then the angel fed him some more.

And after Elijah is rested and nourished, he has an encounter with God.

1 Kings 19:9

***But the Lord said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"***

***10 Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." 1 Kings 19:10***

***11 "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind.***

***After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire.” 1 Kings 19:12***

***And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.” 1 Kings 19:9-13***

Think about that for a moment.

All of these different manifestations of the power of God.

The **earth shaking**, **wind blowing**, the **fire burning**

EARTH, WIND, and FIRE

And God not present in any of those

Where was God?

God was in the whisper.

He was in the **GENTLE WHISPER**.

Looking at this story, someone asked the question . . .

Why did God choose to do it this way?

He could have spoken to Elijah, through the **EARTHQUAKE**, or through the **MIGHTY WINDSTORM**, or through the **FIRE**.

God had spoken in those ways at other times.

Why, here in the wilderness did he choose to speak in this way.

Why, here in the wilderness did he choose to speak through “the sound of a gentle whisper”?

I think the answer is found in our **Memory Verse** for this week.

It comes from Psalm 34:18

It says . . .

***“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.”***

***Psalm 34:18***

Don't miss those words . . .

***“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;***

The reason that God chooses to speak to us in a gentle whisper in the wilderness, is because when we're in the wilderness, “He is close.”

God leads us into . . .

God sometimes allows us to go through the wilderness, because . . .

**2. The wilderness Offers an Opportunity to Learn Lessons we couldn't in any other way.**

((REPEAT))

What did lessons did Elijah learn in the wilderness?

We don't have to go through all of them, so let me just share with you one lesson . . .

And this one relates to Elijah's appeal to God . . .

His prayer to God to take his life because of how hard he worked and because he was the only one left in Israel who had remained faithful to God, and hadn't bowed down to the false God Baal.

1 Kings 19:14

***“And a voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 Elijah replied again, “I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.” 1 Kings 19:14***

God met Elijah in the wilderness and in addition to giving Elijah the food and the rest that he needed, **he also corrected his math.**

He said, Elijah, I know how lonely following me can get.

**I know how you feel like you're all alone and you're the only one in the country who hasn't bowed down to that false God Baal,** but as you go from here, I want you to know one more thing.

You're not all alone

You're not the only one.

There are actually 7,000 others in Israel who have refused to bow their knee to that false God.

Elijah had to travel to the wilderness to learn that lesson

Because . . .

**2. The wilderness Offers an Opportunity to Learn Lessons we couldn't in any other way.**

One last observation about the wilderness.

Not only can . . . .

1. Your deepest need becomes a **Gift** when it drives you to **Depend** on God.

And not only does . . . .

**2. The wilderness Offers an Opportunity to Learn Lessons we couldn't in any other way.**

But you need to know that . . . .

3. What we **Do** with what we **Learn** in the wilderness is **Up to Us**.

Just because the wilderness offers an opportunity to learn dependence on God, in ways that we wouldn't otherwise. . . .

And just because it's a classroom where we can learn lessons that we couldn't in any other. . . .

That doesn't mean that that learning is automatic and that we will automatically come out of the wilderness better and stronger than we went in.

The children of Israel had a MOUNTAINTOP experience in Egypt.

The mountaintop experience I'm referring to is when they saw God work through Moses in a miraculous way to convince Pharaoh to let God's people go.

They saw the Nile River turn to blood.

They saw a total of ten plagues miraculously fall on the land before Pharaoh not only let them go, but sent them out with great wealth.

They saw Pharaoh change his mind. . . send his army after them.

They saw the Red Sea part before them so they could leave Egypt and that Red Sea swallow up Pharaoh's army.

Yet in spite of all they saw, they rebelled, they refused to believe and enter into the land that God was leading them to.

And the result was 40 years of Wilderness wandering.

40 years of wandering through the desert to get from Egypt to Canaan.

Do you know how long the journey from Egypt to Canaan is if you're not wandering?

If you're traveling in a straight line?

It's about 11 days.

40 years of wilderness wandering to complete a journey they could have made in 11 days - - largely because they refused to learn the lessons that God wanted to teach them.

But having said that I want to remind you that time spent in the wilderness is not always a result of disobedience.

How do we know that?

Well, the example of Jesus for one.

He spent 40 days in the wilderness and he obeyed God perfectly in all things.

What we **Do** with what we **Learn** in the wilderness is **Up to Us**.

You can use those learnings to bless and encourage others who may be going through their own wilderness, or you can choose not to.

The choice is up to you . . . .

And to along with that. . . .

**Your deepest Hurt can be your most powerful Ministry if you'll Allow God to Use You .**

Just about every person who has been greatly used by God has gone through a time of deep pain.

And they would tell you that, that hurt, that pain, was part of what made them who they are.

I don't know what your greatest wilderness experience has been

I don't know what your deepest hurt has been.

But I know that you do.

If I asked you . . . .

"What is the most painful experience you've suffered in life?", you wouldn't have to think long before you came up with an answer.

But what if I asked you a follow up question

What if I asked you, to tell me how you've used that painful experience as an opportunity for ministry?

Would you have an answer?

Think about that painful experience . . . .

Give examples. . . . ((loss of a loved one. . . a failed marriage . . . a child that you've raised to follow who has turned their back and walked away?))

Whatever that most painful experience has been. . . .

Do you think there are others around you, who have gone through or are going through that very same experience, or something similar?

Have you thought about how they might benefit by having you come alongside them . . . . ?

Maybe not to share all the accumulated wisdom you've learned. . . .

But maybe just to say, "I think I understand a little bit about what you're feeling. . . .because the loss you've experienced is one that I've experienced as well."

And I just want you to know that I'm here for you if you need me.

I'm praying for you . . .

I'm weeping with you . . .

2 Corinthians 1:4 says . . . .

***"God comforts us in all our troubles . . .***

Because when we're hurting we need comfort. . .

And that's part of why we follow Christ, so that he will comfort us in our troubles, when we're hurting. . .

Because at the end of the day it's all about me

So the comfort with which he comforts me, is for me, and me alone because it's all about me.

**Is what it says?**

Not exactly.

What it says is . . . .

***"God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.***

Do you mean my deepest hurt can be my most powerful ministry?

Absolutely.

***"God comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others.***

Why??

***When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us."***

**2 Corinthians 1:4**

To whom much has been given, much is expected.

My prayer is that all of us would be found faithful.

Let's pray . . .