

Touchstones Of The Lamb In The Wilderness

Part One: The Purpose of the Wilderness

Preface

My heart in sharing this booklet is to encourage the saints even as I am being encouraged by the Lord. How could anyone possibly express in words the preciousness of Christ to those who believe? He is the Dayspring from on high that gives light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:78). His tender mercies find us in the prison of our own selfishness, and He guides our feet into the way of peace through union into Christ. Seeing Jesus at these times is like discovering hidden treasure in dark places. The greatness of His Cross is ever unfolding before the eyes of those who love His appearing. Sometimes His beauty shines brightest when He is seen in the midst of our own desperation and need. The light of this glorious gospel is described as shining out from our darkness (II Cor. 4:6). Even when it doesn't look like it or feel like it, God is for us for He has given us His Son as the Treasure in our earthen vessels.

Numbers 21:4b describes how we can all feel at times; "And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." The outward journey and our inward lack can bring us all to the point of utter discouragement if we do not see Jesus. I pray that the Holy Spirit will blow away the clouds of confusion that can happen during the process of coming to know Christ as our Life. As we find the "touchstones of the Lamb" in the wilderness of our own experience, condemnation and hopelessness will flee away. The very things that once overwhelmed us can become places of passage into union with Christ if our hearts will receive Him as our way and our Life.

Before coming to know Christ as our fullness, we must truly see that we are a wilderness in need of His Life. The experience of coming to know these things can be compared to the children of Israel's journey out from Egypt into the Land of Promise. This journey required them to pass through the wilderness. Even so, we also must pass through our own barrenness and lack by embracing Christ as our Life and fullness.

God has filled this journey with hidden resources; with touchstones of the Lamb that will bring the defiled, serpent bitten, murmuring person back into Life so that they do not perish outside of the Land. Throughout this booklet we will look at three of these touchstones and how they can be unto us an example of God's faithfulness to provide Himself a Lamb that we might enter into to all His fullness. But before that we will discuss the wilderness experience that prepares our hearts to appreciate and partake of the Lamb with true purpose. May we hasten on our journey to know the Lord in all His fullness as one new man (Ephesians 4:13).

The Purpose of The Wilderness

There have been many thoughts and opinions concerning God's view of us during times of trial and failure in our Christian walk. One of the clearest representations of this time in the scriptures is when the children of Israel were journeying through the wilderness on their way to the Land of Promise. This excursion has been referred to by some as a wilderness boot camp where the people would have to get strong and pass some tests so that they could qualify to enter into the Land. That viewpoint misses God's heart for His people during this time. Far deeper issues were being dealt with during that journey. It was a time of discovering their lack and God's provision as well as a time of knowing that in weakness His strength is made perfect. It was a time of beholding the Lamb in a way that would change them forever. Although the children of Israel may have been wandering in the wilderness, God had marked their path with distinct touchstones of the Crucified Christ. These landmarks of Life were meant to lift them out from their confusing maze and fleshly messes into the Light of God's Face and Plan. God is faithful to make a way to escape through His Cross (I Cor. 10:13b). Times of severe crisis and failure throughout the wilderness passage could have become points of finding the heart of God and entering into His spirit. We will refer to these "landmarks" in the wilderness journey as "touchstones of the Lamb". These points are clearly laid forth in the scriptures and are given for our admonition so that we might not fall prey to unbelief based on our own lack, but rather behold the Lamb and enter in to His fullness!

God does not lead us out into the wilderness for us to perish there. He does not test us to tempt us that we might perish from His purpose. His plans for us have an expected end, and within His plan God has provided the way through which they will come to fulfillment. God's faithfulness extends far beyond what we often perceive. Right in the midst of every dark valley and seemingly hopeless situation is the Lamb, high and lifted up from the earth. He will draw us out from ourselves and into His Life. If we touch Him through our faith, believing upon Christ and Him crucified as our provision, then we will be brought into the land of the living out from our own darkness and desolation.

The Wilderness, The Land of Discovery

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart... that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."
Deut. 8:3b

Before discussing some of the specific touchstones of the Lamb in the wilderness, it will be beneficial to take a brief look at what the Hebrew people had been going through before their journey. The children of Israel had been led out of Egypt with a mighty deliverance. They were freed from bondage to the Egyptians and liberated from the oppression of slavery to a foreign nation. They had danced and sang in celebration. Their external enemy had been removed, and they felt free. The nightmare that lay behind them in Egypt had just been swallowed up by the Red Sea, but the nightmare that lay ahead of them in the desert was something they were not expecting. In fact, the journey they were embarking on would cause many of them to want to return to Egypt.

The people knew that the Land of Promise was their destination, but all they saw before them was an endless sea of sand, piercing hot sun, and dryness in all directions. It was as if they would have to pass through a land of emptiness in order to reach the land of fullness. As this vast expanse of nothing lay before them, their hearts may have begun to question God. “Why would God have wrought for us such a great salvation in order to lead us into this barren wasteland? Was this just a cruel joke? What purpose could there be in this crushing passage?” We may wonder, “Could God not swallow up the desert just like He did the sea? Was God just setting them up to make them fail? Why didn’t He make it easy and help them get to the Land quickly? If God was for them and on their side, then why would He allow this, and even lead them into this? Would He save them from Egypt just to torture them in the wilderness?”

In reality, we all must stand face to face with the wilderness of our own souls. The Israelites had known the saving power of the Cross in relation to deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea, but they were destined to discover the power of the Cross in relation to themselves. At this point they did not realize that there was an adversary far more cruel and oppressive than Egypt’s heavy bricks and hurtful whips. God wanted to save them from their greatest enemy, themselves. God had provided His Lamb not just for passage out from Egypt, but to pass through the dark night of their own soul.

And so the wilderness becomes the place where we discover our own lack and barrenness to bring forth the Seed. The tests that the wilderness will bring come to prove to us that we, like Abraham and Sarah, cannot do this. God’s heart does not purpose to expose our lack through trials and affliction or to merely leave us as bleaching bones in the sand. His aim is not to “disqualify” the weaker members of the Body, but to reveal that we are all totally weak in ourselves and need the Life of Another in order to enter in. We must be humbled in our own eyes, or we will walk too proudly in the Land. If we do not know the complete wretchedness of our own heart apart from Christ as Life, then we will glory in flesh and defile the Land that is purposed for His increase alone. Being awakened to our own barrenness is the first step towards fruitfulness! This is proven throughout the scriptures times and again.

If God had allowed them to immediately pass from Egypt to the Land of Promise, then the place set apart for fruitfulness unto God by Christ would have been overrun with flesh. A greater apprehension of the Cross needed to be worked in them before they could dwell in that place of abundance. It may help to more clearly illustrate the true situation if we could look at it this way: THEY were yet a wilderness on the inside. The outward desert they were confronted with was only a picture of what they were internally. God did not put them into a horrible situation just to make life difficult; He was simply trying to help them see the condition they were already in. The Lamb God had provided was meant to bring them into a greater salvation than just deliverance from Egypt, but they had to be made aware of the depth of their need before they would partake of the Lamb in an even greater measure.

The Treasure of The Wilderness

The greatest discovery in the wilderness is not the depths of our own wretchedness and barrenness. The end of the matter is not that we are now humbled in our own eyes. All of this is for nothing if it does not lead us to the true treasure of the wilderness, the Lamb that God provided. When we partake of the Lamb of God, then we find the fulfillment of it all. The

center and purpose of all lack and failure is to bring us into keen awareness of the depth of our need for another Life. We will then look for life outside of ourselves. We will not seek to find means of survival in the desert, but cry out from our depths for a Life that can only be found in Christ. The need is no longer a momentary miracle that helps us get by in the desert for one more hour or day. We will no longer seek a touch to ease the momentary pain, rather we will look into God's face and cry out for another Life. "WHO will deliver me from ME" (Romans 7:24)? These seeking hearts will find the touchstones of the Lamb that are in the wilderness. They will not perish, but believe and receive all the benefits the Crucified Christ brings to whosoever will freely partake.

When they could exist in conditions of extremity and lack and still bring forth attitudes of contentment and gratefulness, then they would be manifesting that their inward garden was being possessed by Christ already. They would be dwelling in the Land even before they manifestly passed over into it. The desert would then have fulfilled its purpose and begin to blossom with life. These ones would have another spirit, for their faith would extend forth from union into Christ and not the direness of their outward circumstances. Because in their hearts they were dwelling in the Land already, it would be natural to manifest that by entering into Canaan for the true victory would have already been wrought deep within. It is the deeper issues of the heart that the wilderness was trying to speak to all long. The treasure we are seeking is not our own personal perfection, but Christ as our Life.

The Moment The Touchstone Appears

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32

It is important that we take note of the circumstances in which the Lamb manifests. We will see that in the wilderness journey the touchstones of the Lamb appeared during some of the darkest hours among the people. All Old Testament types of the Cross are speaking of and pointing to the consummation of our Lord's travail at Calvary, so we will look first at the events surrounding His Cross. The Lamb appears here, at this dark hour, being lifted up from the evil on the earth. Out from among the mockers and murderers He is hanging on a cross between two criminals. He is not exalting Himself above them as their condemning judge, but is abasing Himself before them as He hangs on a tree as their substitute and sacrifice. The Lamb is pouring out His life for the ungodly, providing them freedom through His bondage. Surrounded with hateful brethren and deserted by His friends, God's Son manifests that His love has not changed for them at the very worst point of their rejection. He has come to bring them consolation and redemption. Can we comprehend the mind of such a One as the Lamb of God? He is not condemning their failures; He is not exposing them to debase them. Rather He is the One Who is exposed as He is lifted up naked and cursed on a pole so that they might find acceptance through faith in Him. He Who knew no sin became sin so that the rebels who were mocking, cursing, and spitting on Him might be made righteous in Him. This is not a God with evil intents of destruction and condemnation. This is a Lamb that was slain so that we could have Life through His death. To understand this is powerful preparation for the wilderness experience. We must know God's heart or we will not see His faithfulness and misinterpret His dealings. Our hearts must be prepared to turn away from our own status to behold the Lamb. When we see Him by the unveiling of the Spirit, we will be changed and translated out from our wilderness into His fullness (II Cor. 3:18).

Out From The Depths

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

Psalm 130:1-2,6-8

Outside of Christ there is no Life and the world is a wilderness to wander in. Without Him as our Source we can do nothing for we were made to contain Him as our Life. Although this is true, many people are not convinced of it. We may not cry out from our depths because we have not yet seen our deep need for Christ beyond a salvation experience. The wilderness will magnify in our own eyes what we are without the Life of Christ sustaining us. When someone cries out from “rock bottom” they know that their need is for resurrection Life and not another miracle. David said, *“For great is Thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.” Psalm 86:13*

Therefore, part of the wilderness’ purpose is to help us perceive the magnitude of our need for Christ and the vastness of God’s provision through His Son. No one enjoys discovering their own wretchedness and lack. Many try to avoid this at all costs, including deceiving themselves concerning their true condition. But it is very important that we understand our need, for it is from this place and awareness that we can properly embrace the Lamb. Yet, this can be dangerous territory to walk through for many fall snare to fear, condemnation, and unbelief during these times. Very simply, when some see their own darkness and lack they begin to doubt the Word of God and the work of His Cross. Fear and self-condemnation begin to fill their hearts rather than faith in the reality that they are crucified with Christ and He is now their new identity. I did not mention falling snare to murmuring, complaining, bitterness and accusation because these are the some of the very elements that can cause a person to turn from themselves unto Christ. It is out from these deep places of death and wretchedness that some will begin crying out to God for redemption from themselves rather than their circumstances. When we see these horrible attitudes come out of us, then we will be more willing to leave the path of self improvement and run to the Cross, cleaving to Christ as our Life! We are not to “believe in ourselves” but in the power of His resurrection. If we try to find hope in our own flesh, then of course we will fall snare to fear, condemnation and unbelief. Remember, the Cross of Christ did not improve the flesh but crucified it.

God has ordered the wilderness experience to be unto Life, although the process requires trials that will expose man’s true condition and will feel reproachful. God does not ignore flesh or minimize the wretchedness of man’s base motives. God exposes it all for what it is... flesh. God does this to uncover man’s desperate need for another Life. He does not want to leave hope for repair or self-improvement. He does not want one strand of self-righteousness to survive. He does not want us to place the slightest bit of confidence in our own flesh. The greater the depth of our need for Jesus, the deeper He can fill us with His Life. The poor in spirit are not cursed of God, rather they are blessed by Him for He will replace their inward poverty with the richness of His Son.

Because this process requires the unveiling of self, it can be twisted into a time of condemnation and fear. As we discover our impotency to produce the attitudes of Christ, we may fall into despair and unbelief rather than turning our hearts towards the Lord as our sufficiency. We may then receive a bad report concerning the Land and believe that we could never enter into the Land because we are too messed up. THESE are the snares that we must beware of. Our barrenness and lack should turn our hearts towards the Lord as our complete sufficiency rather than causing us to turn away from Him in shame and depression. If we understand the heart of God and the purpose of His dealings, then we will know that His perfect love and care is guiding us to find Christ in the most fulfilling way possible. He loves us enough not to allow us to fall short of partaking of the Lamb in His deepest provision. He is leading us out from the hog pen of a fleshly diet into the feast of His Lamb spread forth before our eyes.

And so we can allow the Cross to cut deeper still. We do not need to fear knowing the vastness of our own lack, for it is also the depth of our need for Christ as Life. We can spend our time beholding the Lamb and partaking of His Life rather than scheming and manipulating our daily path so that we will avoid the situations that manifest how much we need Him. Our greatest fear should not be the viewing of our own depravity, but that we might miss truly seeing the Lord. The greater our own darkness is exposed in the time of trial in the wilderness, the higher the Lamb is lifted up as ALL OUR LIFE. The Lamb becomes the full provision for the true need. We do not need to fear discovering the profundity our own wretchedness, for God has provided His Lamb. In the upcoming chapters we will look at some of these touchstones that were presented to the children in some of their worst times of rebellion, disobedience and sin. Hopefully we will see God's great faithfulness to provide the way of escape during the darkest moments of failure and lack.***

Next month (August 2005) we will have the second half of this booklet:
Part Two: The Touchstones Appear in the Wilderness