

Life In The Wilderness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 February 2023

Preacher: Lewis MacDonald

- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray before we leave at these few verses. Our Lord and our God, we thank you again for this time together. We thank you for the opportunity that you have given us to meet like this and to sing to you and to pray to you and to read your word and to understand it.
- Lord, we thank you for these things because in this psalm, we see how important that time was to David when he was out in the wilderness. And so help us in these next few moments as we think about what life would look like in the wilderness and where we should direct our thoughts and where we should direct our faith.
- Lord, be with us and protect us as well from distraction and protect us from thinking about other things, even for these next few moments. May our eyes be fixed on you, we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.
- So this psalm that we're looking at this morning, it's a very popular psalm. It's not only popular today, but even for the ancient church it was popular.
- You are likely to have sung it every time they met, they would have sung this psalm. And it's popular because it gives us a clear picture of what life would look like in the wilderness.
- [1 : 1 7] We read of the wilderness a lot in the Bible. The Israelites wander through it for years after they escape Egypt and before they reach the promised land. Jesus is baptized in the wilderness.
- Later he spends 40 days there being tempted. And it's in the wilderness, when we read about it in the Bible, it's in the wilderness that our hearts and our desires are most clearly seen and most clearly revealed.
- Israel is being saved out of Egypt. They're being led by Moses. But it doesn't take long for the people there to build up false idols. It doesn't take long for them to turn their back on God and look the other way.
- The wilderness experience shows us what's in their hearts. Jesus, he goes into the wilderness. And one thing that reveals to us about this man is that he's willing to come down to our level.
- He enters into the world and he identifies with a person who's in trouble. And later, when he's tempted in the wilderness, Satan makes so many offers, but Jesus overcomes that.
- [2 : 2 3] In the wilderness we see something of his heart and his desire. So this is a popular psalm because David comes on the scene and he says, here's what your life should look like in the wilderness.
- Here's the model of what it should look like in that place. If we're wanting to talk or if we're wanting to define the wilderness, I think we can do it in two ways.
- We can say that our whole life is in the wilderness. We're not home right now, but eventually we will be home. That's one way we can look at it. Another way, and the way that David would have looked at it in this case, it's the day of trouble or it's the day of uncertainty.

It's the day when these things take over. It's the day that our circumstances become so much for us to bear. David is physically in the wilderness in this psalm, but spiritually as he's writing this, he's in that place as well.

So in the wilderness, we understand what is in our hearts. We understand what our desires are. And David says, here's what's in my heart. Here's what I am holding on to.

[3 : 37] Here's what should be in your heart when you find yourself in that place. So just three ways today that we are guided in this psalm.

Throughout the whole of our lives, we can be guided in these ways, but especially in the days that we find ourselves in the wilderness. Very simple points from this psalm.

We must seek him. We must remember him. And we must rejoice in him. So firstly, we must seek him. David is writing this psalm.

It says at the start, while out in the wilderness of Judah, and it's debated when this was either it's when Saul is king and he has chased David out, or it's when David is king and Absalom comes home and chases off his own throne out into the wilderness.

It's far more likely that it was during Absalom's time, based on verse 11, it says, but the king shall rejoice in God. So David is king.

[4 : 39] And if you know his story, you know that he's already dealt with a lot of trouble and a lot of pain in his life up until this day. And now his son Absalom returns home years after leaving, steals the hearts of the people, turns him against David, and it disrupts the throne so much so that David has to once again run out into the wilderness.

And it's there that David says these words. So God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you.

There is a lot. There's a lot we can say about this verse, about these few verses. And we can't look at everything. But just one thing we can define very quickly. He says he is earnestly seeking his God.

And what he means is that he is setting his mind and his heart on God and everything that God is despite the circumstances around about him.

So in other words, you might be in the wilderness. Your circumstances might be far from what you want them to be. But you go beyond that. And you say, I'm going to fix my mind on God.

[5 : 58] He is going to be your focus on that day. Not what life looks like around about you. But he will be your focus. He might not be easily seen on that day. But he's not lost.

And so you or we, we are going to have to seek him. So the psalmist says he is seeking him. The hard thing, I think, for us today, the hard thing for me to think about is how much he is seeking God or how earnest he is about it.

He goes on to say, My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you. And I think the question is, when I read these verses, is do I say the same? Do I get to the stage where I can talk about thirsting and fainting after God when I say I'm seeking him?

Does it come to the point where I'm seeking him completely with my whole mind and my whole heart? Are we like David? Do we set our minds on God and think on him like we should?

In the wilderness, do we seek him as earnestly as is shown here? Two things, I think, that can help us with that. It's hard.

[7 : 14] It's hard to seek him properly. And we rarely do it. But two things that David says are going to help us in that. In worship, verse 2 says, God reveals his power and his glory.

And for all our days, in verse 3, he says, his steadfast love is better than life. So it isn't something we always do well, seeking God like we should.

But David comes on the scene and he says, here's something that's going to help you with that. Here's something that's going to spur you on when you seek after God. In worship, in our language, on a Sunday when we meet together like this, God chooses to let us see his power and his glory.

And I think that's an important thing to know that when we gather here, in this building, when we gather together, this is the main place, this is the primary place where God says he's going to reveal something of himself to us.

We can worship God, we can meet with him outside of this time. We know that. But he has said, this is where we will certainly meet him.

[8 : 31] He will reveal something of himself to us. This is where we can expect to see something of his beauty and something of how powerful he is. David knew this.

Out in the wilderness with no comfort, no relief around him. He knows he has met with his God in the sanctuary before. And there, in that place, he has understood God's beauty and God's perfection.

So in the wilderness, he says, that's who I want. That's who I need right now. I, earnestly, I seek you. And if we are in the wilderness, we should know that it's the same God who cares for us out in that place as the God who meets with us here when we come together on a Sunday.

He gives us a glimpse of his perfection and his beauty when we gather to worship him. So think of that when you are out in the wilderness.

Another thing that helps us seek him well in just a few seconds, it says, steadfast love is better than life. Even supposing your life right now is amazing and it's just the way that you want it.

[9 : 53] It will never compete with the love that God has for his people. One writer, he picks up on this, talking about David, he says, if one or the other was to be sacrificed, he preferred that it should be his life.

He would be willing to exchange that for the favour of God. God loves his people and his love is so great for his people that even us living the greatest life we could imagine would be nothing in comparison with that.

Here's what is in David's heart. Here's what should be in our heart in the wilderness. Here's what we must do. We must seek him. And if we struggle to do that well, if we know we don't do that like we ought, here's what encourages us.

He is the God who reveals himself to us in worship and he is the God whose love is better than life itself. So seek after him.

Another thing we can do, we can remember him. Not only do we seek him, but David talks about remembering him as well. All throughout the Bible, there is this understanding that some part at least of the believer's life or some part of the Christian's life has got to be taken up with remembering what has happened before and what God has done.

[11 : 23] So an example is Samuel. In 1 Samuel chapter 7, where he's urging the Israelites to turn away from the false gods. The Philistines are marching towards him and they're about to attack him.

He says, you've got to turn away from your false gods and turn back to God. And the Israelites do that. And Samuel prays for them and the Philistines are, they're thrown into confusion, it says.

And they turn away. And it's in that place that Samuel raises up this stone and he calls it as Ebenezer and he says, thus far the Lord has helped us. So if there's any hope for the future for him and the Israelites, he looks back and he sees what God has done already.

And that's what gives him hope for the future. Another example is Jesus out on the boat with his disciples in Mark 8. They've just seen him feed the 5,000 and then the 4,000 with a few loaves and fish.

And now they're out on this boat with him and they only have one loaf left. And they're concerned about this. They can't stop worrying about this. And Jesus, amongst other things, asks them, do you not remember?

[12 : 31] After already witnessing Jesus feeding these people by a miracle, they worry about the present. So Jesus says, do you not remember? How can they be hopeful about the next day if they've forgotten how they've already been cared for and forgotten whose care they add in?

Here's what the psalm says. David's got it right.

Because though things are difficult now and though the future is very much uncertain for him, still he says, I'll remember and I'll meditate.

And though Absalom has stolen the hearts of the people and David has been forced out into the wilderness, whatever rest he gets out there, it will be spent remembering who his God is and what he's done for him up until now.

So he doesn't just seek God, but he remembers him as well. Just a couple of ways in which our last remembering God is important today.

[13 : 49] Verse 7 tells us that when you remember, when you think of what God has done, if nothing else, you'll be reminded that he's a faithful God. For you have been my help, it says.

And verse 5, to go back to the other side of the verse, it tells us that we will be content. So if you remember God, if you remember what he's done, if you purposefully do that in your life, God will prove that he has been faithful to you and you will be content even in this day.

So when we look back, when we think about how far we've come, we're reminded that if nothing else, if we can say anything at all, we can say that God is faithful to us.

We mentioned at the start about David also fleeing Saul. Many years before this, he was chased out into the wilderness in a similar case. and however much he relied, however much he relied on God in that time, surely he has more confidence to do it this time.

Because he can look back and he can say that God has already looked after him, even in danger. And if God can do that for David while he is fleeing Saul, surely he can do the same for him when he again finds himself in the wilderness.

[15 : 16] If you know him today. David sets an example for you, he sets an example for us. Remembering what God has done for you up until now is important because it is a reminder to us that God is faithful.

Paul puts it very clearly when he writes to Timothy in the second letter. He says, if we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself.

Though we might not be faithful all of the time in our lives, though David definitely was not faithful all of the time, we know that. Why can he be so confident when he remembers his God and meditates on him in the night because he knew, because we know that God has always been faithful to us and he'll never be unfaithful.

Remember like David did. Make sure you remember like Jesus urged his disciples to do. that he is faithful and know that he will look after you on every single new day you might spend in the wilderness.

Another reason remembering God is so important, it causes us to be content. So, if we remember, if we think about what God has done, it proves his faithfulness to us, it also causes us to be content.

[16 : 55] You see that in verse 5, my soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food. What a claim this was for David to make.

Out in that place with very little to hand, he says, I'll be satisfied when I remember you. See the change that happens here.

In verse 1, he is panting, he's thirsting for God. And then you come to verse 5 and he's talking about being well satisfied. A change has taken place here. And this is what happens when he worships and when he thinks on who God is and what he has done.

Though he seems so far off, David seeks him and he remembers and he meditates on him and so he is content. The fat that he is talking about here and the rich food is almost certain that he's not talking about eating it himself.

That was against the law. That was against the Old Testament law. It wasn't allowed. And what is pointed to it instead is the fat or this rich food that was offered as a sacrifice in the sanctuary.

[18 : 07] It was the fat that was burnt on the altar as an offering. And what David is getting at here what David is getting at is the joy, the satisfaction he had when he was in the temple worshipping God and making offerings to him.

However that looked in his day it caused him amongst other things to be content with the promise that God was in his presence. And out in the wilderness far from the feast far from the sacrifices that he enjoyed to make to his God he was sure that he would have the same contentment even in that place when he remembered his God.

That joy that he had in being safe in the physical sanctuary when he was able to read and pray and take part in worship he's sure he's going to be satisfied in exactly the same way when he remembers God's goodness.

remember God and all that he has done for you the psalmist says because not only will it prove to you that he's faithful but it will cause you to be content it will even bring you joy like the joy David spoke of in the sanctuary.

We should seek him like we're meant to but we should remember him as well. think about everything he has done for you. Lastly and just to finish we're told to rejoice in him so we have to seek him we have to remember him David ends by talking about rejoicing in him.

[19 : 52] He is certain that all the harm that is coming his way will be dealt with so he says but the king shall rejoice in God. this is probably I think the hardest point for me to get alongside with because surely rejoicing isn't on our minds when we're in that place where everything's going wrong and there's so much uncertainty surely rejoicing is not something that we're thinking of doing.

That's not what David is saying he's saying I'm going to seek him I'm going to remember him but I'm going to rejoice as well. And why would he rejoice right in that moment?

Because he has absolutely no doubt that God is going to rescue him in this case as well. In Isaiah in chapter 43 God speaks to the people about what he's going to do for them.

We don't have time to read all these verses but there's this movement at the start of that chapter from God speaking about how he's going to personally care for these people to how in some sense he's going to care for them globally as well.

What happens to the other nations is going to be for their benefit. And I think when we read this last paragraph in Psalm 63 and we see what David is so confident about we see something similar.

[21 : 22] Here is a God who cares so much for his people that he's going to fix the mess around about us. Just like David was sure of just like God promised the Israelites that the trouble that is in your life today will be dealt with.

And though it might feel heavy and though it might feel painful God says that for everything that happens to us his people will be preserved. if today you can't say that you know him, if you know today you haven't believed in it like you should here's the promise in the psalm.

Even for your worst days and even for the time in your life where you're sure that everything is going wrong and nothing is going to fix it there is one who comes down to our level and says he will fix it.

There is one who entered into the wilderness himself but who is now in heaven. John calls him the ruler of kings on earth and it is this man it is Jesus who promises to fix everything that is wrong and to deal with the mess that is in our lives.

Maybe not today maybe not in a way that we would ever think of but right now he works on a personal and a global level for the sake of his people.

[22 : 49] If you haven't put your trust in him learn to do it because he'll give you a reason to rejoice. He'll give you a reason to be glad today.

Just three things that David encourages us to do in the wilderness when things don't make sense when things don't make sense when things seem uncertain three things seek him and if you struggle to do it well then remember he is the God who reveals himself to you in worship and he is the God whose love is better than life.

Remember him and all that he has done for you because when you do that he proves that he's faithful and he gives you contentment and rejoice in him in other words be glad and rest in him as hard as it is he is in control on a personal scale in your life and far greater than that and he will fix all the trouble in your life for you have been my help and in the shadow of your witness I will sing for joy my soul clings to you your right hand upholds me let's pray before we sing to close