

My Personal Wilderness

by Andrew Strom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of wilderness experiences in shaping faith and preparing individuals for God's promises through trials and brokenness.

Duration: 48:22

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-3, Matthew 4:1, Matthew 6:33, Acts 9:23-25, Romans 8:24-25, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:39-40

Topics: "Wilderness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being watchful for the moment when God's promises will be fulfilled. They encourage listeners not to lose hope or give up in the wilderness, but to have resolve and purpose. The speaker references biblical examples such as Moses and Joseph, who went through periods of brokenness and testing before experiencing the fulfillment of God's plans for their lives. They highlight the need for preparation and trials in the lives of individuals whom God wants to use.

Transcript

Amen. All right, let's just pray. Father God, we just pray, Father, that though we be few in number, God, you are here in the midst of us.

We know that you bring people to hear certain messages at certain times, Father God, and we just pray, I just pray that this message will be truly meaningful to all of us gathered in this place, Father God, that you would speak to our hearts, that you would minister to us, and just that we would be honored with your presence here today, oh God. We pray you'd be glorified and you'd receive all the honor in this place, oh God. And we just thank you for your holy presence, in Jesus' wonderful name.

Amen. Amen. Please turn with me to Matthew chapter 4. This morning I'm going to be speaking about the wilderness, the importance of the wilderness in our lives, the importance of brokenness, periods of testing, periods of preparation, periods of trial, before any promised land can come.

And this applies, of course, I think on a large scale groups, but I really certainly believe we find this pattern all the way through Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament, in the lives of individuals, those who God wants to use. If God wants to use you, which I believe all Christians, of course, to a greater or lesser degree, are going to be going through testings and trials, and that's part of the preparation, in fact, in many cases it is the most essential part Matthew chapter 4, verse 1. Now this is straight after Jesus was baptized. Just a few verses earlier, a couple of verses, we see the Spirit of God ascending upon him like a

dove, and a voice from heaven comes saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased.

So he's received this endowment of the Holy Spirit, and immediately what do we see? You might think, okay, he's received this powerful endowment of the Holy Spirit, now is the time for the ministry to break out. That's what we would all think. There is certainly a pattern of that happening in Scripture, but interestingly enough, this pattern is even stronger in Scripture, the one that happens here to Jesus.

Even he, who is the only begotten Son of God, shows this pattern. Matthew 4, verse 1 says, then was Jesus led up by the Spirit. So the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

You could say, to be tested. Why is God allowing the devil, not just allowing, why is the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness for this time of great testing and trial? Well, this is a pattern that we see throughout Scripture, and in fact, we don't really find anyone being used of God in any major way through the Bible without this pattern occurring. And many times, it's not just 40 days, Jesus is unique in the time period that he went through.

40 days of no food, probably just, maybe just little bits of water here and there, we don't even read about that. But all the time, the devil is waiting for opportunities, waiting for when he might be growing hungry, the devil shows up immediately. He knows exactly the moments at which to strike.

Jesus is feeling maybe particularly weak in his body, and the devil is looking at the situation, saying, when am I going to be able to come in and maybe tempt him to worship me? When am I going to be able to come in, and he knows he's got a mighty calling on his life, and that God is going to give him the kingdoms of the earth one day. When can I just jump in and kind of tempt him to just take a shortcut to that? When can I appeal to his, maybe if I can find some vanity inside of him? Maybe I can find a little spring of pride there. What can I find in Jesus that I can begin to manipulate him? Now this, of course, was not successful, but the trials and testings of men and women who are used by God, they're universal.

Who are the people that we see going through maybe years of this? Even Paul, he spent 14 years in a certain place away from everyone else. Why is Paul, who could have been all that time ministering powerfully, inheriting his calling immediately, walking straight into it. He was a learned man.

I would say he probably could preach about his own experience certainly, almost straight away. Why is that not happening? Why is he spending 14 years in a kind of backwater before we really even see him coming into any kind of ministry? He's not even sitting under the anointed ministries of his time in those days. He wanted to learn from God.

God took him aside. God sent him to a place where he wasn't going to be recognized. He wasn't going to be given his due as a minister of God.

He was going to be kept down. He was going to be kept out of it. These kind of things we think, they're very perplexing things.

And really the answer to it all is this. Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies, it can bear no life. This is the principle that Jesus spoke.

Unless something dies, unless it falls upon the rock and is broken, then it has to be crushed to powder. If it's not willing to go into brokenness. Can we just have a look at the life of Joseph for a minute? Please turn with me to Genesis chapter 40.

So why is God doing all of this? You would think he would, you know, think of this for a moment. David, who was an obvious choice for king, he was a man after God's own heart. Instead of being successful in any real way, we see that David is anointed by Samuel to be a future king.

So he's received an anointing from God to be a leader. Not only that, he had defeated Goliath, who no other man of Israel, including the king, could defeat. He did it with ease by the power of the Spirit of God upon him.

So he has an anointing from God. He has a kingly gifting, and it's obvious to everybody, including King Saul, who starts hunting him down and worrying about him. This entire thing plays out with David having to live for years in caves, fleeing for his life, cold and abject and hungry at times, losing all of their belonging, having to chase after marauding groups that are stealing everything from them, ending up in the camps of the Philistines instead of in the camps of the Lord.

You know, just awful, awful, just years and years and years and years of it. Why is God putting somebody through that who already has shown their anointing and their leadership and their ability in battle and in every way? David probably was thinking half the time, you know, I'm ready, God. I'm ready for this kingship.

You know, God, I'm 30 years old now, God. Isn't this the time? God, you know, everybody is always thinking they're ready for the big thing. Many of us have a promise from God, and this is a very important point.

Many of us in our own lives, in our personal lives, we have a promise from God. It might be very often to do with ministry or to do with the future in some way or to do with a message God has given us for the body of Christ or whatever it is. And you just go through these absolute years of hell and you're wondering, why is this message or this promise you've given me not coming true? Why, in fact, does everything actually seem to be getting worse? I have less influence than I ever had.

I have less ability to get this word out that you've given me, and I'm struggling continuously to do this or do that. You know, why is it that Christians, even though they're praying Christians, even though they have a calling from God, they're going through this stuff? Well, the answer is found in all of these patterns of Scripture of which Joseph is a prime example. Some people say Joseph made a bad error of judgment.

We're not going to look at this part, but they say Joseph obviously made a bad error of judgment when he told his dreams to his brothers because they were already jealous of him anyway. And telling these dreams about, I saw a dream of me standing there basically and all the brothers were coming down and bowing down and it's just obviously going to stir up tremendous resentment. And people say obviously that was a terrible mistake and you can certainly imagine that Joseph maybe was a proud young man or certainly felt special and felt rather entitled and so his brothers resented him deeply.

But what happens? Because he shares the vision, because he shares the dream, everything else is set in motion. If he hadn't shared those dreams and visions at the beginning, all of the terrible things and then the fantastic things would not have taken place. His brothers wouldn't have got so jealous of him that they threw him in the pit and sold him off to the slave traders.

They wouldn't have done that. They would have always been resentful, but maybe they would have never got that extreme. But what do we find? They get so angry.

This is like the final straw. He's got this beautiful coat. He's destined to be the leader of the family even though he's not the eldest.

He's born of the favorite wife. Everything. And this is just topping it off.

These dreams and visions that he's having are just beyond belief, beyond what you can take. And these guys are so angry they're throwing him in the pit. What happens even in the church to people that seem to have a special calling from God or a special message from God or an anointing in some area? Very often they're very surprised to find there's no welcome at all from their brothers and sisters.

There's jealousy. There's envy. There's even anger.

They share something that God's shown them and they seem to have a very special relationship with God. Very often this happens. Instead of feeling blessed by it all, they start feeling resentful about it.

And you see often in the church, you see very good people, people who are praying, people who are spiritual, people who have a special relationship with God. They're on the edge. They're forced to the wall.

They're one step from being booted out of the church in a lot of places. I've heard horrendous stories all over the place of this type of thing. And of course most of us have experienced it in some way.

If you have a calling from God, it will be tested. God will allow this testing to take place. And God was allowing Joseph to go where he went.

So Joseph arrives, no sooner arrives in Egypt, is sold as a slave, then he's got God's favor on his life and at the same time there's a, you could almost say there's an anointing of anti-success on his life. I believe it's probably put there by God. It's maybe a little marker over him in the spiritual realm, if you could see in the spiritual realm, saying the equivalent of, you know, when someone gets in school, gets a sign stuck on their back that says, kick me.

And all the kids are running down the corridor kicking the guy. I think Joseph had that. I think he had a favor upon him and he had a little sign on the back of him that he couldn't see saying, kick me.

Because he just gets booted around for a number of years and God is keeping a careful eye. He's not getting injured. He's not getting badly hurt.

He's just getting thrown in jail and through no fault of his own. And they make him the chief of the prisoners while he's in jail. So he's got this favor.

This favor is always there. There's a favor and then there's the little sign on his back. But he's got both.

Everybody can see, how did you end up in here? You don't belong in here. You're a gifted man. You're a natural leader.

We make you the chief of the prisoners. Why? Because it's obvious you're an honest man with integrity. You're a natural leader.

You've just got all the hallmarks of somebody who ought not to be in this dungeon at this time. How on earth did you end up in here? And the same is true of everyone called by God in some area. So we find Joseph in Genesis chapter 40 and he makes friends with the butler and the baker of the king who have

been thrown into the dungeon.

He interprets their dreams for them. And lo and behold, Pharaoh acts just as Joseph has prophesied and pulls the butler and the baker out of prison and Genesis 40 verse 21 and he restored the chief butler. This is Pharaoh.

He restored the chief butler unto his butlership again and he gave the cup unto Pharaoh's hand but he hangs the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. So exactly what Joseph told actually happened. Listen to this.

Verse 23. Here we go again. Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph but forgot him.

So here's the guy that's basically prophesied that he's going to get sprung out of jail. This guy should have been uppermost in the butler's mind. Is it the butler? Yes.

Uppermost in the butler's mind and Joseph is at last thinking oh praise God after all these years someone who's close to the king is going to start speaking on my behalf. And it says instantly it's got to be God again instantly the butler forgets who Joseph is. It just goes straight out of his mind.

He's been restored to the right you know to being the one of the closest men to the king. Joseph is forgotten again and listen to the next verse. In verse in chapter 41 and it came to pass at the end of two full years that Pharaoh dreamed and then it goes on to tell us what Pharaoh dreamed.

And suddenly Joseph is remembered and in one day isn't this interesting in one day he goes because the time the fullness of time has arrived Joseph goes from the prison to the palace in one day. Everything that the locusts have eaten is restored and far more than that a thousand fold in one day he goes from being an absolute scum of the earth to being the equivalent of a prince in the Egyptian kingdom. Why is all of this taking place? Why do we see the same pattern in the life of David? Why are we seeing the same pattern in the life of Moses? You know Moses thought he was a deliverer and went and started to try and deliver the people.

What happens to him is the people reject him his own people reject him and he starts to get hunted like a common criminal and has to escape to the back side of the desert. How long does he spend there? 40 years until every ambition to lead is just boiled out of him. You could say he's totally broken.

It says in scripture he was one of the most humble one of the meekest men that ever lived Moses. No wonder 40 years of just brokenness and basically giving up the dream. In that time he's basically saying you know what the promise that God gave me when I was a young man forget about it I'm just going to tend sheep and be out here in the wilderness of Midian and probably die pretty soon.

I'm 80 years old I'm going to I'm just not going to I'm just going to have to forget about it because God obviously doesn't want me doing that. Then in a single day God appears to him the burning bush appears to him gives him signs and wonders and miracles gives him a special anointing where everything he speaks in the way of even plagues and all kinds of things comes true and suddenly he's a prophet of God and he's sent back to Egypt despite his protests. Sent back to Egypt as a mighty man of God who when he speaks things immediately happen.

He has signs and miracles following him and Egypt is forced to listen to him and he becomes the deliverer that Israel has been crying out for and they can no longer reject him. So God is doing two things there's

always a testing going on God is testing the faith and really testing to the depths I guess everything inside of a person during these wilderness times. Jesus when he was here in the flesh he got filled with the Holy Spirit you could say or an endowment of the Spirit of God from on high came upon him so that means he's ready for ministry.

In theory that means he's ready for ministry.

David had a kingship anointing imparted upon him by Samuel that means he's ready for kingship in theory he has the anointing of a king upon him but no we don't see it immediately he's called into this terrible trial most cases it goes on for years you know Leonard Ravenhill made a very interesting comment I'm sure he made it later in his life he said it takes God 20 years to make a preacher it takes God 20 years to make a preacher why does it take God that long you know it's not always the case Charles Spurgeon was a young preacher George Whitfield was a young preacher but generally speaking God is at work in the lives of people preparing them with untold testings he's allowing the devil to have a go at them very often a lot of things we think is just the devil opposing us yes

that's true God may have allowed it because we're going through a testing and a trial and God is easily capable I often see what I call unbroken young men unbroken young preachers and man they're full of vim and vigor and they go for it and they're praying all hours of the day and night and they really think they've got it and boy they've really got it together I remember myself at that age and I was exactly the same so I can't despise it but you know there's not a lot of anointing on their preaching even though they're praying like the house is burning down and they're fervent and powerful in all kinds of different ways there's not much anointing on their life why because they're severely unbroken they've never been through you know they haven't had time yet to go through this awful

awful testing they just haven't and God is sending us all through various stages of testing but we need to look up Joseph wasn't far wrong when he got that bit of hope come into his life in the form of this butler and this baker he wasn't far wrong that this was going to lead to something he obviously felt something significant happening there God gave him the interpretation of their dreams and two years later so he had two years yet to wait he probably thought instantly he was going to be sprung out he had two years yet to wait and bam suddenly and God often does things very very suddenly with people that have been in wilderness for a long period of time what happens with David in David's case what was he waiting for he would not lift his hand against the king would not not for any

reason he was waiting for God to take care of King Saul and we noticed that after King Saul is dead sadly Jonathan died with him so even the air is dead the natural the air of the kingdom so to speak is dead David becomes king of Judah very very quickly becomes king of Judea and he's no longer backward in taking the kingdom he just says I now I now will inherit I now I'm the natural and the anointed man for this for this task this is my moment and I will take the kingdom and we are going to lead it into a glorious time because he's a man after God's own heart and part of the testing that he went through was that he wouldn't lift his hand against the leadership even though it was sour and it was off wouldn't lift his hand against that leadership and so God anointed him raised him up in due

time turn with me please to Luke chapter one a lot of this stuff resonates with me personally you know I sometimes feel like I'm on a never ending wilderness journey so I kind of enjoy comforting myself with sermons like this of course some in the Old Testament says that they didn't receive the promise I'm sure they received their own personal promise but they never saw the promised one that they were waiting for

that many had been praying and waiting and going through hell on behalf of a coming Messiah on behalf of a coming deliverer to Israel they never saw that promise they died before the promise was given I don't believe that that is really the pattern that New Testament believers are on I believe that once God anoints you for a task and once God promises something to you there will

be a delivery date sadly the delivery date is usually not a week later I can say this from experience Luke chapter 1 verse 76 talking about the arrival of John the Baptist now this is his father prophesying over him Luke 1 76 you shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins in verse 80 it says still speaking about John the Baptist and the child grew and wept strong in spirit and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel what an interesting comment so he was in the deserts and the wilderness places until the day of his showing to Israel they say that John the Baptist while he had a wilderness ministry that basically it was taking place beside the main road out of Jerusalem so it was

not far from a major highway and that would have been I guess where he went to to begin his preaching ministry when the moment arrived so he was in the deserts until the time of his showing forth and we may have a specific gifting a promise from God a ministry calling that is like at this time unshown forth there's not a lot of people recognize it not a lot of people are willing to notice it not a lot of people have heard it it doesn't seem to be going anywhere doesn't seem to be getting anywhere at all and then a time of the showing forth of that gifting or calling or message suddenly arrives and it's important that we have faith and that we keep hope in our heart but all of that will be under great assault I believe God causes situations where we will become virtually hopeless that we

will virtually fall into despair that we will be in I believe all of these people that we're talking about went through all of these very strong temptations and crushings and so on even the most confident and what I say especially the most confident can expect to go through this because a lot of confidence of the young zealot Christian is confidence they don't realize it but confidence in themselves they're just so used to things falling into place they're so used to being able to stand up and just with energy get things done and you know again I can just remember myself being that way when I was young I just got so much done with energy and energy is just the arm of the flesh I mean most of it was the arm of the flesh God and his grace would sometimes anoint it and things would happen

from God but so much that we do in the church today so much of church so much that we see in quote unquote the kingdom of God today is just energy just guys with enthusiasm and a vision and a growth scenario and they can even chart it all out for you what's going to happen and they've got methods and they've got everything going but even on a more subtle level than that guys who think they've really got God's message and so on many of them have but God doesn't God's not so desperate for that message to come out that he'll forget about the man God will go to work on the man and he'll take his time and it will really really hurt really really hurt why is God doing that is because our flesh doesn't please God doesn't bring forth things that please God our flesh is going to get us into

trouble you get to a certain level you know some people can handle before they get into pride or into silliness some people can handle being over 20 people some people can handle being over 50 people but you know God is always looking at what levels he can trust us with they can you know he's asking the question okay if I put this person in front of a conference of 100 people what's going to happen are they going to get proud are they going to go back into the flesh again and start trying to make everything happen by themselves and you know God's always asking these questions he doesn't trust a lot of people

midst of the sorrows that accompany that burden father God and let us truly inherit every promise I pray for everyone in this room let us truly inherit every promise that you've ever made unto us Oh God let us not be behind or backward and inheriting any of them father bring us all into our promised land Oh God whatever it is that you've promised to us pray all these things in the wonderful glorious name of Jesus Christ amen

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