

PEACE IN THE WILDERNESS

- A. Introduction: In this series we're working on getting to the point where we are not moved by life's trials and hardships from our faith and confidence in God. I Cor 15:58
1. In the last few lessons we've focused on the fact that Christians get moved from faith and confidence in God because they misunderstand His present purpose in the earth. These misunderstandings lead to false expectations about what God will and won't do for us in this life, and when those false expectations aren't met, it leads to disappointment and anger at God.
 2. We must understand that God's primary purpose in the earth is to bring people to saving knowledge of Himself through Jesus — not make this life the highlight of our existence.
 - a. Although there is provision and help from God in this life, He has not promised to end the hardships and suffering of life because that's not His main concern right now. I Tim 4:8
 1. The greater and better part of life is after this life, first in the present invisible Heaven, and then on earth after it has been renewed and renovated into a fit forever home for God and His family. Rom 8:18; II Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-4; etc.
 2. The life to come will mean an end to all suffering and hardships. It will mean restoration and recompense for the losses and injustices of this life. However, if people never put faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, they will miss out on the blessings of the life to come. Matt 16:26
 - b. This world is not as God intended it to be. It has been damaged by sin. Jesus made it clear that in this world we will have tribulation — trials, distress, and frustration (John 16:33, Amp). But He promised peace of mind in the midst of life's hardships to those who submit to His lordship. John 16:33; John 14:27; Matt 11:28-30
 1. Experiencing this peace is not automatic. To experience it, we must learn how to let not our hearts be troubled (or agitated and disturbed).
 2. This means we must know how to address the disturbing thoughts and questions that come to all of us — especially in the midst of trouble: Why is this happening? How could a loving God let it happen? If God is good, then why doesn't He end the all the suffering in this world?
 3. Last week we said there are several key facts about God and the nature of life in this world that you must know if you're going to be successful at keeping your heart from being troubled by agitating and disturbing thoughts. Let's briefly review what we said.
 - a. There is no such thing as a problem free life because we live in a sin damage or fallen world. When Adam disobeyed God, a curse of corruption and death infused the human race and the earth itself. We all deal daily with the consequences. Gen 2:17; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 1. God is not behind the troubles of life. He does not orchestrate circumstances to teach us, test us, perfect us, or make us patient. We know this because Jesus never did anything like that to anyone. Jesus shows us how God treats people.
 - A. Jesus said: I only do what I see my Father do. If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father because I do His works by His power. John 5:19; John 14:9-10
 - B. If Jesus didn't orchestrate difficult circumstances or send troubles into anyone's life for some unknown purpose (and He didn't), then God the Father doesn't do it.
 2. You can shut down a lot of troubling, disturbing thoughts when you learn how to answer the *WHY* question. Why does bad stuff happen? Here's the correct answer — because that's life in a sin cursed, fallen world.
 - b. Why doesn't God intervene and stop all the evil and heartache in this world? First of all, remember that He will do exactly that in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus.
 1. But we must understand that when God created human beings, He gave men and women free will. With free will comes not only the freedom to choose, but the consequences of the choice made. This world has been and is continually affected by the consequences of millions and

millions of free will choices — going all the way back to Adam.

2. However, because God is All-knowing (Omniscient) and All-powerful (Omnipotent), He is able to use the hardships resulting from free will choices and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose which is to bring men and women to saving knowledge of Himself through Jesus.
 4. The Bible is filled with examples of God using the harsh realities of life in a sin cursed earth and causing them to serve His ultimate purposes as He cares for His people in the midst of their difficulties.
 - a. These examples were recorded in part to encourage each succeeding generation, including us, and give us peace of mind in the midst of the storms we face. Rom 15:4
 - b. These accounts are historical records that give us insight into how God works in the midst of the difficulties of life in a sin damaged world. When we examine these accounts, we find some common characteristics as far as how God.
 1. God often puts off short term blessing (like ending trouble now) for long term eternal results.
 2. The Lord has perfect timing, and at the right time, His people see results. Just because you can't see something happening doesn't mean nothing is happening. It simply means you can't see it yet because much of God's work is invisible until, at the right time, we see results.
 3. God works in the circumstances to bring maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible. He is able to bring genuine good out of genuine bad as He causes circumstances and the choices people make to serve His purposes.
 4. Almighty God never abandons His people. He can cause us to flourish in the midst of trouble. And He gets His people through until He gets them out.
 5. In this lesson we're going to examine one of these historical records and see how all this plays out in real life: the generation of Israel whom God delivered from bondage in Egypt.
 - a. Keep in mind that these were and are real people. (The Bible is 50% history.) Although it was a real event, like many events reported in the Old Testament, Israel's deliverance pictures what Jesus provided through the Cross.
 - b. What happened to these people is referred to as redemption because God delivered them from slavery in Egypt (Ex 6:6; Ex 15:13). Redemption means deliverance or rescue (*Webster*).
 1. Redemption is the term used to describe what God has done for us through Jesus — deliver us from bondage to sin and death.
 2. Even though Israel was redeemed, and even though we are redeemed, we still face hardships and challenges because we live in a fallen world. But God works for good in the midst of it.
- B. About 2121 BC God called a man named Abraham to leave his homeland (modern-day Iran) and travel to Canaan (modern-day Israel) to live. God promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation (Israel) through which the promised that the Redeemer of mankind (Jesus) would come. Gen 12:1-7
1. During the generation of Abraham's grandson, Jacob, the entire family (75 in all) went down to Egypt to live during a time of great famine. At first they were welcomed, settled there, and prospered greatly. The family's rapid growth alarmed the Egyptians, and they eventually enslaved Abraham's descendants. The family remained in Egypt for 400 years. Ex 1:1-22
 - a. Why did Abraham's descendants end up enslaved? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth. It's the nature of fallen men to rule over other men. Fear and jealousy motivated the Egyptians to exercise their free wills and make choices that caused trouble for other people. Ex 1:9-10
 - b. God used this time in Egypt. Abraham's descendants grew from 75 people to over 3,000,000.
 1. Their numbers were increased to the point where they would actually be able to take possession of and hold on to the land of Canaan. Additionally, due to a variety of factors, the population of Canaan actually decreased during these 400 years.
 2. It also gave additional time for God to work and try to draw the inhabitants of Canaan (wicked idol worshiper) to Himself before Israel arrived to drive them from their lands. Gen 15:16
 - c. God eventually raised up a man named Moses and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of

- Egypt. Through a series of power demonstrations (plagues) that were a direct challenge to specific Egyptian gods, carried out over a nine month period, Pharaoh (king of Egypt) agreed to release his captives, and Abraham's descendants began their journey back to Canaan.
2. There were two routes back to Canaan from Egypt—the Way of the Philistines and the wilderness route through the Sinai Peninsula. Ex 13:17-18
 - a. The first route had an easier terrain, but it was populated by a warlike tribe of idol worshippers called the Philistines. The second route was a desert wilderness, mountainous and dry, with peaks rising to 7,400 feet and less than 8 inches of rainfall per year.
 - b. Even though these people were redeemed, there was no easy way for them to get to Canaan because that's life in a fallen world. Adam's sin produced a sin nature in man that resulted in aggressive tribes bent on conquering other men. Desert regions and the hardships they present (lack of food and water, snakes, scorpions, rocks and dirt, etc.) also developed because of the curse of corruption and death that entered the material creation when Adam sinned.
 - c. Why didn't God simply make it all go away or "beam them up" and transport them to Canaan? It just doesn't work that way. And, although God didn't orchestrate the challenges along either route, He knew which one would produce maximum results—the route through Sinai.
 3. Israel set out for Canaan, following the Lord (Ex 13:20-22). They quickly found themselves trapped at the Red Sea with the Egyptian army pursuing them from behind when Pharaoh changed his mind.
 - a. This route seemed like a mistake, but God had a plan. He parted the Red Sea and Israel walked through on dry ground. When the Egyptian army attempted to follow, the waters closed over and destroyed them. Notice that God used the problem to solve the problem.
 1. This is a tremendous example of God bringing tremendous good out of a really bad situation. A real threat was removed from Israel. Egypt's army was formidable and the distance between Egypt and Canaan was not that far. Egypt would have been a constant threat to Israel.
 2. The parting of the Red Sea had a tremendous affect on Israel: When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the Lord has displayed against the Egyptians, they feared the Lord and put their faith in him and his servant Moses. (Ex 14:31, NLT)
 - b. God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea also impacted the heathen, idol worshipping nations in that part of the world.
 - a. By the time Pharaoh released Israel, many Egyptians had become convinced that Jehovah was and is the True and Only God (Ex 8:19; Ex 9:20). In fact, a mixed multitude left Egypt with Israel. They were non-Hebrews: Egyptians and possibly members of other nations that relocated to Egypt during the great famine. How many Egyptian soldiers may have cried out for mercy as the sea closed over them, because they too realized that Jehovah is God?
 - b. When Israel finally entered Canaan, Rahab (the prostitute in Jericho who hid two Israeli spies and saved their lives) revealed that the people in land heard about what God did in Egypt, causing her and others to fear the Lord and to acknowledge Him as the True God. Josh 2:9-11
 4. Three days past the Red Sea, and running low on water, the Israelites reached a place called Marah, with pools of undrinkable water. Why? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth. Ex 15:22-26
 - a. But God demonstrated that He would provide for their physical needs in this harsh environment. He would get them through until He got them out. In their first big challenge in the wilderness God met their physical needs and promised to be their physician. Healeth comes from a word that means to mend or doctor. Ex 15:26
 - b. The Lord instructed Moses to throw a tree into the water, and it became drinkable. Why didn't God make the water drinkable before Israel got there? Because He saw a way to use the circumstance.
 1. The bitter waters at Marah provided an opportunity for Israel to exercise and strengthen their faith in God. They were going to face even bigger obstacles in Canaan (walled cities and giants) and would need proven faith. Marah would have been a great place to remember that God solved a water problem for them three days earlier and would surely help them now.

- A. You don't know what is up ahead in this life. The practice you're getting right now at exercising your faith (or believing what God says despite what you see) may be exactly what you need to overcome in your next even bigger difficulty.
 - B. Marah brought out an ugly trait in Israel, complaining (Ex 15:24; Ex 16:2,3). Trials expose character flaws, and once exposed, they can be dealt with. This is another way God uses life's hardships. Israel didn't acknowledge or deal with their complaining and it built a habit of unbelief in them that cost them Canaan. I Cor 10:6-11
2. God helped Israel anyway and provided for them as they journeyed. Not only did they leave Egypt with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, God provided water, quail, and manna, and their clothes and shoes didn't wear out. Ex 12:38; Ex 16:4; 13; Ex 17:6; Deut 8:4
 - c. Notice one more point. People mistakenly say that God tests us with circumstances. But God's test to Israel at Marah, and in subsequent days, was His Word. Would they do what He told them to do? Ex 15:25-26; Ex 16:4
5. We see God's timing in Israel's story. The trip from Egypt to Canaan was an eleven day journey. Yet it took Israel two years to reach Canaan. Deut 1:2; Num 10:11-13
 - a. That seems too long to us. But much good was accomplished during Israel's "waiting period".
 1. God met with Moses on Mount Sinai and gave them the Law that Israel would live by once they settled in Canaan. Not only would it help Israel set up a functioning government and social order, the Law was critical to God's unfolding plan of redemption. The Law was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ by showing us our sin and our need for a Savior. Gal 3:24
 2. God instructed Moses on how to build the Tabernacle and carry out the sacrificial system that would cover their sin as it pictured what the Redeemer would do with our sin.
 - b. The two year delay gave time for word of the Egyptian army's defeat at the hand of the God of Israel to spread all the way to Canaan through trade caravans and travelers.
 1. By the time Israel arrived, the tribes in the land were afraid of them, giving Israel great strategic advantage (present help). But their delay also produced eternal results.
 2. As pointed out earlier, Rahab realized that Israel's God was and is the True God. She joined the people of God and is in Heaven today because Israel's arrival was delayed for two years. How many other people in Canaan came to the same realization? Josh 2:9-11
 - c. Sadly, the first generation God delivered from Egyptian bondage refused to enter Canaan once they reached the border because they didn't believe God would help them. God sent them back to the wilderness to live as nomads until that generation died off. God then brought their adult children into the land to settle Canaan. Num 13-14
 6. Much of what we believe about God and how He works is inaccurate and troubles our soul.
 - a. It's not unusual to hear people say: "God's got me in the wilderness". By that statement they mean the Lord has brought them to a place of trouble to test them, perfect them, purge them, etc.
 - b. When we read the Bible account of a people group that God led to and through the wilderness we find that they were there for two reasons. In the first instance, there was no other way to get where they were going. In the second instance, the people refused to obey God and enter Canaan.
 1. God sent them back to the wilderness for eternal purposes. He wanted them (and the generations that followed) to see the seriousness of not entering in as God proscribes. Jesus is the only Way to salvation. If you refuse Him you cannot enter the land of Heaven.
 2. God continued to provide for His people during those forty years in the wilderness—the pillar of cloud and fire to guide and protect, the manna, the water, the indestructible clothing; etc.
- C. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider these thoughts as we close this lesson. Jesus connected peace of mind with His Word (John 14:27). God's Word shows us how He works amidst life's hardships. He's given us snapshots of real people to show us behind the scenes information as well as the end of story. We can battle troubling thoughts with God's Word and have peace of mind in the wilderness.