

## THOSE WHO WANDER ARE NOT ALWAYS LOST!

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Good morning fellow Air Streamers. You made it here to Rock Springs and the Sweetwater Event Center. Congratulations on arriving at the International Rally here in Wyoming. I hope you got here safely. We all need to pray for a safe and problem free return to our homes as well. I hope you didn't find yourself lost too many times on your way here.

Every time I am driving in this country, I thank God for President Eisenhower and his vision of the Interstate Highway system. During World War II he was constantly bogged down in Europe trying to move men and material in his battle against the Germans. Not only did he return home and suggest we build a new highway system, he got it started and the building of it is still continuing. Currently, where I live, Interstate 11 is being pieced together from Reno, Nevada through Las Vegas, to Phoenix, Arizona.

So today we will take a look at people in the Bible that wandered through wilderness areas. We will look at their struggles and see if we can recognize any parallel events that have faced us in our time. Of course we live in a time where we benefit from so many technological assistants. Folks in the Bible did not have accurate maps, GPS, Google and Apple maps, satellites, cell phones or the Internet. I know many people that arrived here and came in a caravan with other club members. They played "Follow the Leader." I wish them good luck getting home!

I don't think anybody that drove here avoided that feeling that comes over a traveler when they look around at the landscape. "Are we in the middle of nowhere?" Driving through parts of Wyoming can do that to you. You can see for miles in all directions with nothing to look at except sand and sagebrush. "How did the Native Americans and explorers survive here?". Somehow they did and with God's help, so did the people in the Bible Stories.

I will mention the number "40" many times in this sermon. Whether it is referring to hours or days or years, this number appears in the Bible 146 to 149 times depending on which translation you choose to read. 40 symbolizes a period of testing, trial and finally triumph. Can we endure through this time to become more spiritually aware of our need for God?

We will begin with Noah and his family. You will remember that it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. Talk about wandering in the wilderness. They were on the open ocean for more than a year with all those animals and no land in sight. First they sent out a raven that returned with nothing. Then it was a series of doves. Finally a dove returned with an olive branch. Then their watery wilderness turned into a wilderness on the land. God's commission was "Go forth and multiply."

More forties are coming. Elijah wandered in the wilderness for forty days until he was able to speak with God. Goliath taunted Saul's army for 40 days until David came and slew him. Moses led the Israelites to the foot of Mount Sinai and was gone for 40 days. When he returned with the 10 commandments he found that his people had turned away from God and become idol worshippers. The former Egyptian slaves then traveled near to the promised land. They sent 12 spies into the land of Canaan to determine the strength of the enemy. Forty days passed and the spies returned. Even though God had told them the land would be theirs, 10 of the spies recommended that the enemy was too strong. Only Caleb and Joshua trusted the Lord and said the attack should take place. The Israelites decided to not take the land. God sent them into the wilderness for 40 years. When they returned only Caleb and Joshua were allowed to go into the promised land with the offspring of the original slaves. Moses had to remain in the wilderness.

So how did thousands of people survive wandering through the wilderness for so long? First of all God provided a food called Manna. The literal translation of the word is (What is this?). It would appear in the morning on the ground and had to be gathered quickly as it would be gone later in the day. There would only be enough for one day, so you lived day by day.

Here God is teaching us the difference between need versus greed.

The thousands were following Moses but what were the guiding signs. If they travelled by day, there were pillars of clouds that could be seen and followed. If they traveled by night, there were pillars of fire to guide the way.

In the wilderness there are always more questions than answers. Think of our wanderings through the Pandemic. Questions about this. Questions about that. What about work? Can I stay healthy? Should I get vaccinated? How are my relatives that I can't visit? So many unknowns. We had to trust that the Lord was in charge and have faith in him, just like the Israelites did so many centuries before.

My home church in Carson City, Nevada is currently on a wilderness journey. Our 57 year old Pastor died of a massive heart attack on March 1<sup>st</sup>. You can imagine the effect on our congregation when someone that seemed so healthy and vibrant is suddenly taken from our midst. The elders are working hard to keep things going and searching for a transitional pastor to take the reins. In the meantime, we are missing our leader but trusting in God who knows the way and is in charge.

So next, we will turn to Jesus. He is in his Glory at the Jordan River. He is baptized by John the Baptist and begins his ministry on Earth. As he comes out of the water, the skies open up and a voice calls out. "This is my son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." Then the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove. Jesus is then taken to the Wilderness of Zin where he fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. WHAT! He begins his ministry in the desert? Why would Jesus be taken into the desert to be tempted by the devil?

He is hungry and the devil says, "Turn these stones into bread." Jesus responds with the words of Moses. "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The devil puts Jesus on a high tower and tempts him to flaunt his own power. Jesus responds with the words of Moses again. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Finally, the devil shows

Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. "Worship me and you can have all of these." Jesus uses Moses' words again, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

The wilderness is the place where everything that distracts you in life is stripped away and you find out who you really are. In this case the wilderness was essential.

Let's look at the kind of world that Jesus was about to enter. It was a political situation that sounds a lot like what exists today in our world.

The Roman Empire had conquered Israel and they were a constant, looming, oppressive force that cast a shadow over everything. The people of Israel divided into five factions in order to deal with the Romans. The first group said, "Join the Romans, become like them or be crushed by them." This is what King Herod did. They were the HERODIANS. The second group said, "Kill the Roman swine." The ZEALOTS wanted to stir up violence and go to war with the Romans. The third group hid behind their money and power. They buried their heads in the sand trying to maintain the status quo. These were the SADDUCEES. The fourth group believed that if the nation cleaned up their act, avoided sin and followed the laws of God, then he would return and deliver them. They were the PHARISES. The fifth group headed for the hills and became monks. They had given up and awaited God's judgment on everyone else. They were the ESSENES.

Jesus was about to step into this divisive political landscape. Each group looked at the others with animosity. Their ideology was correct and the other groups were wrong. Sound familiar?

Jesus did something radically different. He didn't see groups, he saw humans in need. He didn't see a tax collector when he saw Matthew. He saw a human being and called him to follow him. When he saw a prostitute or a leper or a fisherman, or a wild man in the desert, he saw no labels. As a follower of Jesus, you are a beloved child of God. Because of that you are free to love everyone, no matter who they are or what side of a heated debate they may

stand on. When you love like this you may feel all alone, it will be a wilderness. But you will never be alone, because the Spirit of God will be with you.

When you leave this International gathering in Rock Springs, you will be entering the wilderness once again. Whether you are going home or on a caravan or heading somewhere else, you will have many chances to affect other human beings in a positive way. Maybe you will encounter strangers, or relatives or fellow travelers. Show them kindness and mercy. There is no need to be judgmental or unfriendly.

Jesus invites us to step into the wilderness. To hear the voice of God that says, "You are my Child, my beloved, in you I am well pleased." Then you can choose to love all people, no matter what anyone may say. This is the way of the Kingdom of Heaven. AMEN