

This morning, we are continuing to go through the Life of David as recorded in 1 & 2 Samuel. Today we will look at David's time spent in the wilderness, from 1 Samuel 21-31.

Because it's such a long passage, I will give a quick summary: David flees in 1 Samuel 21 after Jonathan, the son of King Saul, tells him that King Saul wants him dead. He will spend 10 years in the wilderness until the day that Saul dies. David first goes to a priest named Ahimelech, and when Saul finds this out he kills not only that priest but 84 others priests. David then flees to Gath, to Achish the Philistine king. But he's afraid that they will kill him, since the Philistines are Israel's enemies, so he pretends to be insane in order to escape. He escapes to the cave of Adullam, and there his brothers and family and 400 men join him – the text says that all who were in distress, in debt, or discontented join him. They become a group fighting off bandits, protecting people across the land. But again, Saul finds out where he is, and while hiding in a cave, David has a chance to kill him but does not. A woman named Abigail saves him from killing a man in anger, and David ends up marrying her. Saul goes after David again, and again David has a chance to kill him while he is sleeping, but once again David will not kill the king. David escapes to Gath and serves the Philistine king. But eventually the Philistines fear he is a spy, so the king tells him to go. As they are returning to Ziklag, they find that the Amalekites have raided the land and taken their children. David and the men pursue and take back what has been stolen from them. And in the next fight, Saul and Jonathan are killed. And David can finally come back to Israel to become the king.

I want to use this account of David in the wilderness to talk about wilderness times in our life. In the Bible, the wilderness is a place of danger, of deprivation, of tempting and testing. It is not safe, it is not easy. Sometimes it's all you can do just to survive. In our lives, we often find ourselves in seasons like this, where we may feel lost, unanchored, in danger, tempted and tested, and it's all we can do to just survive.

David will be king, but first he must go through the wilderness. This is a common theme in the Bible, and common theme in our lives. Joseph will be second in command over Egypt, but first he must go through a long season where he will feel forgotten. The Israelites will be in the promised land, but first they must walk through the wilderness. Jesus begins his ministry in the wilderness, tempted and tested by Satan. You are also going to have to go through times of wilderness on your way to the place God is bringing you.

What do we learn from David about how to survive the wilderness, this place of danger and deprivation, tempting and testing?

### 1) Make the Lord your refuge

The word refuge is used 37 times in the Psalms. Here is one in particular from when David was in the wilderness:

*Psalm 57:1-11 - For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A miktam. When he had fled from Saul into the cave. Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. <sup>2</sup> I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me. <sup>3</sup> He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; Selah God sends his love and his faithfulness. <sup>4</sup> I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts-- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. <sup>5</sup> Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth. <sup>6</sup> They spread a net for my feet-- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path-- but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah <sup>7</sup> My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. <sup>8</sup> Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. <sup>9</sup> I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. <sup>10</sup> For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. <sup>11</sup> Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.*

A refuge is a place of shelter or protection from danger or distress. What does it mean to take refuge in the Lord? **It means that you no longer look to anything in this world to give you the safety and protection you are longing for, but you look to the Lord.** And as you do that, you find that as long as He is with you, you will have all you need, whether rich or poor, safe or threatened. During his time in the wilderness, David learns to find his refuge in the Lord. You find that the world in many ways is a wilderness. As everything you once had or depended upon is stripped away, the wilderness teaches you dependence upon God.

*Psalm 63:1 - A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah. O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

A song that captures this dynamic well is a hymn called "I asked the Lord that I might grow," which was written in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by John Newton, who is best

known for writing *Amazing Grace*. Listen to Newton's lyrics, and how poignantly they describe how God uses situations that we don't understand to teach us dependence upon Him and to shape us into the people He wants us to be:

*I asked the Lord that I might grow  
In faith and love and ev'ry grace  
Might more of His salvation know  
And seek more earnestly His face*

*'Twas He who taught me thus to pray  
And He I trust has answered prayer  
But it has been in such a way  
As almost drove me to despair*

*I hoped that in some favoured hour  
At once He'd answer my request  
And by His love's constraining power  
Subdue my sins and give me rest*

*Instead of this He made me feel  
The hidden evils of the heart  
And let the angry powers of hell  
Assault my soul in ev'ry part*

*Yea more with His own hand He seemed  
Intent to aggravate my woe  
Crossed all the fair designs I'd schemed  
Cast out my feelings, laid me low*

*Lord why is this I trembling cried  
Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death  
'Tis in this way the Lord replied  
I answer prayer for grace and faith*

*These inward trials I employ  
From self and pride to set thee free  
And break thy schemes of earthly joy  
That thou may'st seek Thy all in me*

As we make the Lord our refuge in the wilderness, we learn that the Lord is always with us.

**Isaiah 43:1-5** - *But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. <sup>2</sup> When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. <sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. <sup>4</sup> Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life. <sup>5</sup> Do not be afraid, for I am with you;*

This world is a wilderness. But the Lord is your safe place. He will never leave nor forsake you.

## 2) Trust in the Lord and walk in obedience.

God has promised David he will be king, but then he ends up running for his life. This is not the path he would have expected. But even though he has two opportunities to kill Saul and escape the wilderness, David will not kill him.

**1 Samuel 24:1-22** - *After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." <sup>2</sup> So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats. <sup>3</sup> He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. <sup>4</sup> The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. <sup>5</sup> Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. <sup>6</sup> He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." <sup>7</sup> With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way. <sup>8</sup> Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. <sup>9</sup> He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? <sup>10</sup> This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he*

is the LORD's anointed.' <sup>11</sup> See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. <sup>12</sup> May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. <sup>13</sup> As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you. <sup>14</sup> "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? <sup>15</sup> May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand." <sup>16</sup> When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. <sup>17</sup> "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. <sup>18</sup> You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. <sup>19</sup> When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. <sup>20</sup> I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. <sup>21</sup> Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family." <sup>22</sup> So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

He trusts the Lord to be true to His promise. In the wilderness, you can either turn from God or learn to trust Him. It can be very hard to trust in the Lord when you find yourself in the wilderness, when you have no idea where God is or what He is up to.

Elisabeth Elliot, the prominent Christian writer and speaker who died recently, tells of visiting friends of hers in northern Wales who owned a sheep farm. She shared about how the sheep are vulnerable to being eaten to death by insects and parasites, and so once every year, the shepherd has to take his sheep to a huge vat of antiseptic and completely submerge his sheep. The farmer, in order to save his sheep from death, has to actually hold his sheep underwater in the antiseptic until they have been disinfected. As Elliot put it:

*One by one John seized the animals. They would struggle to climb out the side and Mack the sheep dog would snarl and snap at their faces to force them back under. When they tried to climb up the ramp in a panicky way at the far end, John the farmer would catch them, spin them around, force them under again, holding them ears, eyes and nose submerged for a few seconds.*

*And as their lord and master was pushing their head under, drowning them at least as far as they could tell, their panicky little eyes would look up over the edge of the vat, and it was easy to see what they were thinking. What is god doing?*

Reflecting on that experience, Elliot continued:

*I've had some experiences in my life which have made me feel very sympathetic to those poor sheep. There are times I couldn't figure out any reason for the treatment I was getting from my great shepherd whom I trusted. And like these sheep I didn't have a hint of an explanation.*

How is a sheep to know that what feels like death at the hands of their master is really saving its life? The sheep can not understand the ways of the shepherd. Given the choice, they would likely run far away from their master, rather than go into the vat. But only the shepherd knows that this harsh treatment is necessary for saving their life.

**Not only does David trust the Lord, he does his best to walk in obedience.** David and his men become a band of good Samaritans, fighting against bandits in the wilderness and caring for those who are harassed and helpless.

This attitude and behavior comes in handy when they find the Egyptian man in 1 Samuel 30:

*1 Samuel 30:11-20 - They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat-- <sup>12</sup> part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights. <sup>13</sup> David asked him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He said, "I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. <sup>14</sup> We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag." <sup>15</sup> David asked him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" He answered, "Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them." <sup>16</sup> He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. <sup>17</sup> David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. <sup>18</sup> David recovered everything the*

*Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. <sup>19</sup> Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. <sup>20</sup> He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder."*

His obedience prepares him for this moment, and the Lord uses it to lead him to the Amalekites who plundered them.

### 3) Don't go through it alone

David is surrounded by men who will fight alongside him and support him.

*1 Samuel 22:1-2 - David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. <sup>2</sup> All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.*

His band of misfits looks a lot like the church. We enter a church looking for God and to our dismay find ourselves surrounded by a ragtag group of sinful men and women:

*1 Corinthians 1:26-31 - Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*

This is how Eugene Peterson put it: *"Every time I move to a new community, I find a church close by and join it – committing myself to worship and work with that company of God's people. I've never been anything other than disappointed: every one turns out to be biblical, through and through: murmurers, complainers, the faithless, the inconstant, those plagued with doubt and riddled with sin, boring moralizers, glamorous secularizers. Every once in a while a shaft of blazing beauty seems to break out of nowhere and illuminate these companies, and then I see what my sin-dulled eyes had missed: word of God-shaped, Holy Spirit-created lives of*

*sacrificial humility, incredible courage, heroic virtue, holy praise, joyful suffering, constant prayer, persevering obedience. I see Christ."*

Don't go it alone. Have men and women who will walk with you through the wilderness.

#### 4) See the wilderness through eyes of grace

After David takes back the plunder in 1 Samuel 30, he brings it back to the 200 men at the Besor Ravine who were too exhausted to fight with them:

*1 Samuel 30:21-24 - Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with him. As David and his men approached, he greeted them. <sup>22</sup> But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go." <sup>23</sup> David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. <sup>24</sup> Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."*

Even though they had not won the battle, they shared in the plunder, because David understood grace. He was given more than he deserved, and so he shared the grace with others. In the same way, we can survive even in the wilderness when we remember that we have been given so much, and we have all we need in Jesus.

See the wilderness through the eyes of grace. See Jesus in the wilderness, tempted by Satan, suffering for us, forsaken by God, bringing us salvation. Because of his suffering, we have been given new life and a sure hope. See the wilderness through the eyes of grace, trust in the Lord, and obey Him until He brings you through.