

WHAT IS THE WILDERNESS

We are looking at Heb, Chapters 3 and 4. After he quotes from the 95th Psalm, concerning the day of trial in the wilderness, and God declaring because of their disobedience and unbelief they would not enter into His Rest.

Heb 3:12, "Take care, Brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God . . . vs. 17, And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

Chpt 4, vs. 1, "Therefore, let us fear . . . lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it . . . vs. 8-11 of Cpt 4, "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience."

Last Sunday we identified the rest of which he is speaking. The Canaan rest or the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God to enter into we saw was Christ. Canaan or our rest is simply living with Christ in the now.

Today, we want to answer the question, what is the wilderness? He lays emphasis on the wilderness in these two chapters. He refers back to Israel's wilderness experience and exhorts us to not make the same mistake that they made. Though the wilderness was an experience Israel had to go through. It was not the Promised Land by any means . . . it was not what God had promised them. And it was not something that was permanent.

Let's look at a few Old Testament scriptures . . . **Deut 2:2-3**, "And the Lord spoke to me saying, you have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north." **Deut 12:8-9**, "You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you."

The Lord has been leading you for the past 40 years. You have witnessed His many great miracles, and His powers and His wonders, but God has not yet brought you to His resting place and He has not brought you into the place of your inheritance.

You remember **Deut 6:23**, "and He brought out of there in order to bring us in , to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers." He brought us out so that He might bring us in . . . the ultimate goal of bringing Israel out of their slavery and captivity was to bring them into their rest or into their inheritance.

Now, in Hebrews, the writer is concerned with a failure of christian people to enter into their rest. And he made it plain that when Joshua led the children of Israel over the Jordan River and into the promised land, that was not the ultimate rest that God had in mind for His people. Many years later through David the Psalmist, he spoke of a rest that God had for His people and he said there remains a rest for the people of God. So his exhortation that we read from Heb Chapters 3 and 4 is that the christian may not fail to enter the rest that He has for us. And we saw that the rest which He has for us is all that Christ has to offer for us and to us here and now.

The Hebrew writer's concern is that if the christian will not enter that rest and if the christian does not enter that rest, he will flounder all his life and die in the wilderness. He does not want the same thing to happen to the church that happened to Israel in the wilderness. They will fail to enter the rest that God has for them which is all of the riches in Christ, and if they fail to enter that rest, he says you will die in the wilderness.

Let's read a passage from **Numbers 20:5**, they are complaining against Moses now and asking, "Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us to this wretched place?" **The wilderness is a wretched place.** It is a place where there is no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates or water to drink.

It is much easier to talk about what we do not have than to talk about what we do have, and that is what Israel is doing. Israel is grumbling and complaining about what they don't have and they are failing to go in and possess what they do have and what God has given them.

We've all seen the signs along the highway exhorting us to prepare to meet your God. The question to me is not are you prepare to meet your God, the question is, Are you prepared to live victoriously during the time He has allotted you here upon the earth? The question is not where will you spend eternity, the question is how are you spending your time now?

You see, I think it is easier to prepare to go to heaven than it is to prepare to live here upon the earth. And that is what the church is concerned about.

If His rest is Christ, what is the wilderness that he is warning us against? An easy summary would be the wilderness is place which is the opposite of the rest in God, and that is true. It is the opposite of God's rest. It's a place of work. We are working, you are not resting. It's a place of wondering, we are not settling down. It's a place of weariness, they grumbled and complained against God, they had to bear our heavy burdens .

There is something here I think we need to understand. In **Heb, Chpt 4, vs. 10**, "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." **Once we enter into the rest of Christ, we cease from our own works. The church is busy about its own works.** Now listen to what he said about Christ and works in Heb 10:12, "but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD." Vs. 14, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

This is what Christ did for us . . . this is why He is called our rest. He offered one sacrifice for all sin for all time, took His seat at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us. There is nothing more we can do. All of our works and all of our labor cannot improve upon that. Vs. 18, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any sacrifice or offering for sin." There is nothing more we can do to add to what Christ has already done for you. We don't have to work and to labor and to strive to climb or to crawl or to scratch our way into God's good pleasure.

Christ has done it all . . . you can enter into His rest and cease from your labors. He said come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.

So let's be a little more specific, I think the wilderness is where the Gospel is not thoroughly mixed with faith. Heb, Chpt 4, vs. 2, begin is vs. 1 "Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it . . . vs. 2, For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also (now that is a remarkable statement . . . he is saying Israel in the wilderness, they had it also, they had the good news, they had a gospel preached to them, but the Hebrew writer said), the word they heard (they heard the word) did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." **That word "united" means to be thoroughly mixed.**

The word that they heard did them no good "it did not profit them" because it was not thoroughly united with faith. Let me read from **I Thes, Chpt 2, vs. 13**, "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message (you received the word of God's message), you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." It was thoroughly mixed with faith.

There is always a tendency to mix the word we hear with something else. We need to understand this . . . it is not enough to hear the word of God preached or even to accept it. He says we have to mix it with faith. **And it we don't mix the word of God with faith, we are going to mix it with something else.** The Galatians took the gospel that Paul preached and mixed it up with the Law and they tried to be justified by accepting the gospel and adding to it and mixing with it the keeping of the law of Moses.

The Colossians mixed it up with gnostic philosophy, and so Paul writes to the **Colossians, Chpt 2, vs. 8**, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." They had received the gospel of Christ, but they had concluded that Christ is not enough. And so they added the deceptive philosophies and the traditions of gnosticism to it and had mixed it in to what Paul had preached to them.

The Corinthians took the gospel of Christ as Paul preached it and they mixed it in with their pagan philosophy, and the paganism they had been accustomed to live in before they had the

gospel. So Paul wrote I Cor showing us all of the turmoil, all of the sin, and all of the disunity that was going on in the Corinthian church. All because they had taken the gospel and tried to mix it in with their pagan worship.

The Thessalonians had taken the gospel and mixed it with the wild prophesies about the resurrection and the second coming.

The Hebrews, the book we are studying, they had taken the gospel of Christ and evidently mixed it up with a defeatist attitude, and they were beginning to fall away and turn aside from the faith because they had taken the gospel that they had heard and had not mixed it, as he said, with faith.

Today, we condemn the paganism that has been mixed up through the centuries with Catholicism. We have condemned Catholicism for what we have called the paganism of what they have brought into their church.

But our modern christianity, protestantism, fundamentalism, our modern churches have been so mixed up with Greek and Roman mythology . . . we have mixed the Gospel with astrology and the occult and humanism and psychology and eastern mysticism and the traditions of our fathers and this has become so mixed in with the proclamation of the Gospel that many of us would not know the true Gospel if we met it coming toward us in the middle of the road. What are All of the extras that we have added to the gospel in our protestant/baptist churches?

Three times in these Hebrews chapters, he says, "harden not your hearts." Heb 3:7, 3:15, and 4:7, "TODAY, IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." **And he is speaking to christian people, not to sinners . . .** If you hear My voice Church, christian people, today if you hear My voice, do not harden your hearts . . . he is not talking to sinners . . . he is talking to the church . . . this is a failure to act upon the Word of God. **Holding to all of these extras hardens our hearts to His voice.**

And I have found when we mix the Gospel with something else, we will defend that something else to the death. It becomes such a part of us that when the Gospel is preached in its purity and we have to make a decision between the Gospel and what we have mixed up with it, we'll take what we have mixed up with it every time! That's the Wilderness!!

The wilderness is when they hear the Gospel but it is not thoroughly mixed with faith.

Another thing . . . the wilderness is a place where the leaders . . . continue . . . to strike the rock. I'll explain what I'm talking about.

In I Cor, Chpt 10, Paul talks about a spiritual rock that followed them through the wilderness and he said that rock was Christ. Now we know Moses got water for Israel from a rock . . . he struck the rock and water came forth and the children of Israel got water in that barren land from that rock. But Paul, in I Cor 10, said actually that the rock that had been following them in the wilderness was Christ. That physical rock that Moses struck was simply a symbol of the Christ

who was among them . . . they did not know it, of course. But in the New Testament, Paul interprets that rock in the Old Testament as being Christ.

Now, in Exodus, Chpt 17, is where Moses strikes the rock . . . vs. 6, Israel was grumbling to Moses about not having any water . . . and God said to Moses, "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." Now that is quite a miracle . . . No water . . . and they cry out to God for water . . . and God says to Moses, I'm going to stand before you on this rock at Horeb, and when you strike that rock, water will come out . . . Israel's thirst will be quenched . . . and that is exactly what happened.

Now keep that in mind as we turn over to Numbers, Chpt 20, vs. 1-12, when Moses struck the rock and gave them water they were in the Wilderness of Sin, in Numbers 20, it is now 40 years later, Num 20:1, "Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the Wilderness of Zin (they were in the Wilderness of Sin to begin with, now they are in the Wilderness of Zin 40 years later), vs. 2, "And there was no water for the congregation (history is repeating itself) and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. The people thus contended with Moses and spoke saying, vs. 3, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the Lord's assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? And why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink."

Vs. 6, Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to them; and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." Simple isn't it.

Forty years ago, Moses struck the rock and the Lord gave them water . . . and now, the Lord told Moses if you will go before the rock and speak to the rock, I'll give you water. Vs. 9-12, "So Moses took the rod from the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock? Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank."

Vs. 12, "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"

Israel knew this was a wretched place and they knew all about the Promised Land in their heads . . . **Moses had been preaching it for 40 years, but he failed to take them into it . . . he failed to take them in.**

God said speak to the rock and Moses struck the rock . . . Heb Chpt 10, vs. 12, a passage we read earlier, "but He, having offered one sacrifice for sin for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."

Christ, the rock, had been struck, the rock was smitten, He died on the Cross. But now He has been raised from the dead. He has ascended. And He is living and He is reigning, and so Heb 10, vs. 14 says, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who believe." Moses was told to strike the rock in the beginning, but the second time he was told to speak to the rock.

Christ was smitten and crucified once, but now He has ascended and He is alive. We are reconciled by His death (the smitten rock), we are saved by His life (the living rock). The rock only has to be smitten one time and then we speak to it. The Cross is a once and for all thing . . . when the redemption is made, then we turn to the Throne of Grace. We don't keep smiting the rock, we come boldly before the Throne of Grace.

Moses declared a crucified Christ, but not a risen, ascended, and reigning Christ. Moses was a good christian, fundamentalist preacher who preached a whole lot about the Cross. But he never mentioned the ascension . . . he never mentioned the resurrection . . . he never mentioned the fact that Christ would be living, and ruling, and reigning.

He got stuck on the Cross where most of our churches are stuck today. We preach a crucified Christ and we glory in preaching the Cross and we quote Paul saying, I know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified . . . that's alright in the beginning, we need to preach the smitten Christ, we need to smite the rock, but we don't need to keep on smiting it . . . We need to get on with it!

Moses got them out, but he didn't get them in. That's what the church does today. It gets them out, but it doesn't get them in. We get them out of sin by preaching the Cross. But after we get them out, we don't lead them any further. We keep preaching the cross. We keep smiting the rock instead of speaking to it . . . we never bring them to the place where they realize the fullness of God's rest in the living Christ (believing our sins have been fully forgiven, His sacrifice was enough, we don't have to keep on making sacrifices for our sins . . . unbelief is the only thing preventing us from coming boldly before the Throne of Grace, from living our life entirely in the presence of the Lord, every day, every minute of every day . . . You Know, we long for the day when Christ returns and we can live in the presence of God for eternity . . . Hebrews is telling us "Enter God's Rest Today" . . . we don't have to wait for Christ's Second Coming, Hebrews is telling us we can live in the very presence of God all day/everyday Now . . . we have access to the Throne . . . come boldly before the Throne Now and stay there . . . to the extent that you sit yourself down at the Right Hand

of the Father in Christ right now . . . don't just stick your little toe in and pull it out . . . move in . . . permanently . . . don't miss it!!)

They died in the wilderness. They never got into the fullness of Jesus Christ. They never really ascended to sit with Christ in heavenly places. They stayed down there at Golgotha. That's the wilderness.

There is another thing . . . the wilderness is a place where there are no giants and no conflicts. For 40 years, they wandered in the wilderness and we do not have a record of them every meeting a giant. The giants were over in the Promised Land . . . that's why they did not go in . . . that's what scared them to death. They had a few skirmishes there in the wilderness, **but never did they fight a full-scale battle while they were in the wilderness.**

For 40 years they wandered around preparing to fight, getting the men-of-war ready . . . that's what the Book of Numbers is all about . . . they had a great Army, but they never did any fighting . . . They didn't have to . . . there were no giants to kill . . . **there were no great conflicts until they crossed over.** That's when the fighting started and that's when they had to face the giants.

And we are content as a people to wonder around in the wilderness because there are no giants over there and there is no conflict over there . . . it is a safe place. We know that if we get into the fullness of Jesus Christ, He is going to put our armor on us and He is going to put us into battle and He is going to bring us into the presence of the giants . . . he says all of those who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution . . . don't think that because you become a christian that all of your problems are going to automatically go. That's when you are going to start having problems.

Whenever you hear someone preaching that if you have problems in your life that is a sign of a problem with your faith . . . that is wilderness preaching! That is striking the rock. In the land, there are giants, there are problems that seem to be insurmountable . . . there are conflicts we think we are not capable of winning, but the only way we can win them is to trust in the God who is leading us. But, in the wilderness, we are relatively safe. And that is where most church people like to stay.

Let's look at two concluding thoughts . . . the wilderness is a place where you are forced to choose sides. All through the wilderness experience, God is calling them through Moses and He is saying "Who is on the Lord's side?" All who are on the Lord's side, come over here with Aaron and I. And all who are on the side of Korah and Dathan and Abiram and all these rebellious people he had to deal with (Num 16:1-25) go over on that side . . . God was always calling them to take sides.

Now, let me show you an interesting passage in the Book of Joshua, Chpt 5, . . . it is on the eve of Joshua's most important battle, the Battle of Jericho . . . vs. 13, "

