



TRUSTING JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS?

10.11.26

Steve Frissell

(The following text is automatically generated and has not been edited)

Steve Frissell 0:00

My name is Steve Furzell. I'm one of the pastors here, and I am so glad I get to be with you today as we open up God's Word. Our lead pastor Liban he is out celebrating a wedding with some family, and he'll be back next week. And so we're excited to have him back, and we start in a brand new series today. You can take your Bibles. You can turn to Matthew chapter four. We're going to be all over the in Scripture today, but we'll get there eventually. Well, two years ago, I was in Libbon's office and let him know that I was walking through a really hard season. I told him, I said, Livin, I I can't sing worship songs out loud right now. That Sunday before, we were singing a song where we're saying, "God, you've never let me down. And in my head, I know, I knew then that God is good, that He really is good, and that He does not disappoint. But in my heart, I felt so disappointed, and I couldn't sing that song with an honest heart, so I shared with Liban where I was at in that season of difficulty. And because Liban's a great friend and an incredible pastor, he cared for me really well through that season. And you've probably found yourself in seasons like that as well. And these are seasons that we don't plan for. We don't put them on our calendar; they just show up and they just happen to us. And there's a variety of reasons why we may end up in one of those seasons. For you, it could be a loved one that's in crisis, and there's nothing you can do to help them. It could be for you that something felt certain, and then now it's no longer certain. A door closed, a relationship ended. Maybe you're waiting for God to show up in a way that you believe He would, and He just hasn't shown up. Maybe nothing dramatic has happened in your life, but you find yourself in a moment where God used to be so easy to see and hear, and all of a sudden you find it hard to see Him, and you can't hear him quite the same way, or possibly for you it's just like the things that that were sufficient for you before are no longer sufficient, and you find yourself really struggling. The Bible has a word for seasons like this: wilderness. But when we look in Scripture, we will see wilderness is all throughout the Bible, from the very beginning to the very end. And yes, it is a location that shows up often. But we also see all the people throughout Scripture head into seasons of wilderness as well. Wilderness-it is such a main part of Scripture. In fact, when you start looking for it as you read your Bible, you will see it popping up over and over again. At the time of Jesus, the understanding of the wilderness was such a massive part of the story of God's people. Now, in your Old Testament, what's translated to wilderness is a Hebrew word called midbar. So, when you read the Old Testament, you see wilderness show up there. This is the word it's using, and this word actually has a range of meanings of what it could mean. A lot of times, when you and I think about wilderness, we think of like something from the movie Dune, where it's just like you know sand dunes for all you can see. But Midbar has a range of meaning. It is desert, but it's also open country, uncultivated land. This picture here represents what could be considered midbar, wilderness, in the Old Testament. It's uncultivated. It's it's a place where the things that you need to sustain life aren't readily available. So it could mean this. It could also mean this other picture. This is the Sinai wilderness, and this is where Israel spent a significant amount of time in their journey and in their story. So, wilderness in the Old Testament has a range of meaning, and what we see in Scripture is people end up in the wilderness for a variety of reasons. Some people are driven there, some people are led there, some people run there. Some people end up there because of something that's been done to them.

Steve Frissell 4:05

Some people end up there because of what's been what they've done. And today, if you find yourself in a season of life that is wilderness, I can't tell you why you're there. But what we're going to do today is look and see what God does and how he shows up for people when they are there in the wilderness. One of the first people that we see in the wilderness is Hagar. Her story is complicated. You can read it in Genesis. Abraham and Sarah were expecting a child. Hagar was a servant to Sarah, and Hagar becomes pregnant, and it dynamically changes their relationship. And Sarah begins to oppress and abuse

Hagar, and Hagar is so oppressed, so abused. Life is so difficult that running to the wilderness seems like reprieve. It seems like an escape. It seems better than her status quo. So she takes off to the wilderness, and look at what happens for her in Genesis. We see that. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring in the wilderness. Now we've talked about this here before. The angel of the Lord isn't just any angel. This is specifically talking about Jesus. Pre-incarnate Jesus is the angel of the Lord. So Jesus is there meeting with her, and he found her. She was on the run. She was tired. She was lonely. She was abused. She was vulnerable and weak. And Jesus found her there, and met with her. And she had such an incredible counter with him that that she named God the God who sees me, El Roy. God, you you saw me. Hagar ended up there because of what was being done to her. Moses ended up in the wilderness for a different reason. He killed an Egyptian, which then led Pharaoh wanting to chase him down. So Moses takes off. He runs out into the wilderness, and he ends up in the wilderness for decades, he's married, he's got a family, and he's a shepherd. And his story is here in Exodus three. Says Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And look at what happens. Then, the angel of the Lord Jesus shows up, appears to him in a flame of fire within a bush. So Hagar, she runs to the wilderness because of what what's being done to her. Moses, he runs to the wilderness in part because of what he had done. He was on the run because he killed somebody, and now this is wild. Decades of him being like away from Egypt. He's off, and he's in this distant land, and he's a shepherd, and his whole life has changed. And I think he's maybe wondering, like, is this the rest of my life? And while he's in the wilderness, Jesus shows up and says, "Hey, I've got purpose for your life, and while Moses thought, "Man, Egypt is in the rearview mirror, Jesus says, "You're going back to Egypt, and you're going to lead my people out. And of all the places, Moses ends up leading them to the wilderness. There's a series of plagues that God uses to convince Pharaoh to let them go, and so finally Pharaoh's heart is like undone. He's like, "Go, take the people, leave, and look at what what we see in Exodus. This this is fascinating. This is something I didn't know for most of my life, Exodus 13. When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them along the road of the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby. Did you know that there was like a fast pass for them? They could have gone from Egypt to the Promised Land. Most of my life, I thought that they had to go from Egypt through the wilderness to get to the Promised Land, but that wasn't the story. That's not actually what happened. Jesus actually took them the long route. Look at what it says. God says this: the people will change their minds and return to Egypt if they face war. So he led the people around toward the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness. He took them to it, but there was a direct route that would not have sent them into the wilderness. It's fascinating.

Steve Frissell 8:39

Now God knew that Israel they had generations of slavery in Egypt, and He had to deconstruct their world thinking and their understanding of themselves as people who are slaves, and He knew that He needed to do it in the wilderness. If He would have taken them straight to the Promised Land. As soon as they saw war, they would have turned around. They weren't ready, so he takes them to the wilderness. But the wilderness was not the destination; it was the place of formation for them, because God had something He wanted to do in their lives. And what we see happen is they go, they get to the Red Sea, and there they are. They need to get across, but they can't. There's an army chasing them down? They have a need. They're afraid, and what does God do? He makes a way. They get to the other side of the Red Sea. They're thirsty. They wonder if they're going to die. Jesus provides water. They have a need. They're afraid. He provides. They're hungry. They think they're going to die. God provides manna over and over again. This is the rhythm of their of their life in the wilderness. They have a need. They're afraid. God provides. They have a need. They're afraid. God provides. And this rhythm, you see it so significantly in the miracle. Manna, God gave them what they needed-their daily bread, bread for that day-and they were to learn and grow every day, trusting that God was going to give them what they needed for that day. They wake up in the morning, and God had bread for them. And if they took more than what they needed to save it for the next day, by the next day, it had worms, and so God was teaching them. He was forming them, and what He was wanting to convince them of over and over again in this this need, fear, and provision. He's convincing them. He's saying to them over and over again, "You are free, and you can trust me. You are free, and you can trust me. You are free, and you can trust me. Well, they have their whole time in the wilderness, and as that season ends, Moses has this message that he gives to Israel. They had 40 years of time in the wilderness, and Moses gives them a message. You can read it in the beginning of Deuteronomy. It's a fascinating message that he gives them. Here's here's part of what he shares with them. Remember that the Lord your God led you on the entire journey through these 40 years in the wilderness. He took you this whole way. Here's what he says next: so that he might humble you and test that you know what is in your heart? Whether or not you would keep His commands, He's forming you, shaping you. He's working on your heart. He humbled you by letting you go hungry, and then He gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known. Here's His last part, so that He, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. God was forming

them. You can trust me. All you need is me. You are free, and you can trust me. This is what He's convincing them of over and over again as He works on the heart of His people. Now, after he's done, or a little bit later in this message that Moses shares with him, he's like, "Hey, you're heading into the Promised Land, and it's a land with milk and honey. I don't know how you feel about milk and honey, but there's also figs and dates. I love that. So they've got all the things on the way, and he says you are about to go into a land of abundance, and you are going to be tempted to believe that all of that abundance that you provided it.

Steve Frissell 12:26

What Moses is wanting them to get and understand in his message is: Hey, when you are in the wilderness, the temptation was wondering if you if you really do believe that God is going to provide, and then you get into this land of abundance, and now the temptation is going to be you think you're able to provide, but at the root of all of it is, do you trust the Lord? So He's giving them this warning, and they head into the to the land. They're done with the wilderness. They head into the promised land, and what do you think happens? They struggle to trust. They struggled their whole time in the wilderness, and they struggled in the promised land. They never quite got it. The wilderness was never really able to fix what was broken in their human hearts, and they continued to struggle. They believed that that that they were the ones that were able to provide. They put their confidence in kings and other gods, and and because of all of this, they went into other seasons of wilderness when they were in exile and taken as slaves by other other nations, and generations, hundreds of years go by, and they look back on that time where Israel was in the wilderness, and and they saw it as something that was meaningful and significant and profound in the story. There was probably times where they thought, "Man, we kind of wish we could go back to the wilderness with God, like our ancestors had, because man, God was right there with them. And the prophets, they begin to speak of a future hope, longing for man. There was a a time where God showed up in the wilderness in the past. We believe, we think, maybe God's going to show up again in the wilderness in our future. Here's what Isaiah says: A voice of one crying out, "Prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness. Make a straight highway for your God in the desert. And sure enough, hundreds of years after Isaiah says this, there's this man that shows up in the wilderness. Same's John, and this dude's wild. He eats locusts. He wears weird clothes. He lives in the wilderness, and he has a wild message: Repent. The Savior is coming. He is coming. He is. He is near. And then this wild guy John has an interaction with Jesus. Jesus shows up and says, "Hey, you're going to baptize me. And John's like, "You don't even need this. You're the Messiah. You have nothing to repent of." And Jesus says, "No, this is going to happen. So John he baptizes Jesus, and something remarkable happens as Jesus is baptized. Look at how Matthew records this. A voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Jesus is baptized into the water, and as he comes up, the father, overwhelmed with his love and his affection for his son, invades creation audibly and says, "This is my beloved son. Wow! How powerful that must have been to hear from the father. You are my beloved. This is actually an echo of another time God said this. Back in Exodus, we see God saying this to Israel. This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, which I want to take a moment and recognize what Jesus is up to. Israel, they started in Egypt, and then they had to pass through the water of the Red Sea. God declares Israel His son. They go out into the wilderness for 40 years, and they were tested. Boy, did they fail! Jesus, his parents. Matthew records this earlier in his gospel. They had to run to Egypt to keep Jesus safe. So Jesus comes out of Egypt. He passes through the water of baptism. He's declared the Father's Son. Now he's about to head into the wilderness for 40 days, and he's going to be tested. Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is reliving Israel's story. So let's take a look, Matthew four. Here's oh sorry, Jesus. He heads out into the wilderness. We don't know what wilderness he went to, but we think it was the Judean wilderness. And here's a picture of it. Imagine what it would be like to have 40 days and nights living remote like this.

Steve Frissell 17:14

Jesus, isolated from people, no food, trying to figure out how to make it through the day and finding somewhere to sleep at night, spending all that time praying to his father until someone shows up, the tempter. Let's take a look at Matthew four. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Verse three. Then the tempter approached him and said, "If you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Now Satan's not wondering if Jesus is the son of God, and Jesus isn't wondering if he's the son of God. This isn't saying if you are; he's saying since you are, right? Since you are the son of God, you don't need to do all of this. You don't need to be fasting like this. Just change the change the stones to bread. This is ridiculous. You're the son of God. Now, what Jesus is being tempted to do here is to meet what is a legitimate need. He's hungry, but it's to meet this legitimate need in an illegitimate way, it's for him to step out of dependence on the Father and take action in and of himself, and to use his power in the wrong way. So Satan's going, hey, hey, hey! You don't need to do all this. Just, just change the stones into bread. And here's what Jesus responds. He responds from Deuteronomy, where we were actually just reading. He says, "It is written, man must not live on bread alone, but on

every word that comes from the mouth of God. We just read this. In fact, every single one of these temptations that Jesus faces, he quotes Deuteronomy six and Deuteronomy eight because he's reliving the story of Israel. The very temptations that they faced are the temptations that he's facing, and where Israel failed because they never really got it and never really were able to trust the Lord fully. Jesus trusts fully and says, "I am. I only need the Word of my Father. That's all I need. Satan moves on to the next temptation. Then, then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple. I'm assuming, guessing, maybe he took him in his mind to this place, but now they're at the temple, the highest point. And here's what Satan tells him to do: says to him, "If you are the son of God again, since you are the son of God, throw yourself down. And then Satan quotes Psalm 91 and says his angels are going to swoop in and rescue you, and what Jesus is tempting to do. I know this sounds like a weird temptation, like who who's tempted to jump off a building, right? That's an easy, that's a hard pass, right? But this is actually a very fascinating temptation because he's tempting Jesus to presume on God. He's tempting him to test and make God prove Himself and His love. He ends up quoting a moment that happened for Israel, where they're in the desert, they're thirsty, and they go, "God, we don't know that You can provide for us. In fact, we don't even know if You're here for us. And so they grumble against Moses, and what they're doing is they're saying, "God, you need to prove that you love us by showing up. Do a miracle to show us who you are. And for Jesus in this moment, for Him to jump off the temple would be forcing God to show up to prove His love, to force God to act, to presume on God. And so Jesus quotes again Deuteronomy. He says, "It is also written, 'Do not test the Lord your God. What Israel did at Massah, I'm not going to do. I'm not going to demand of God. And Satan moves on to the next temptation. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. Again, I'm guessing he takes him mentally to another place, but he shows him all the kingdoms and all the splendor. And here's what Satan tempts him with, and he says to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me, now Jesus came for all those kingdoms. Jesus came to reign and rule.

Steve Frissell 21:30

So what Satan is offering is what Jesus is actually here for. It's what he came to earth to do: is to reign and rule. But for him to get reign and rule, for him to get the crown without going to the cross. It's for him to get what he wants, but it's to compromise, to bow a knee, even if just for a moment. And let's just think about all the times that we're tempted to get what we want, and we just have to compromise our values just for a moment. Jesus, He knows. He knows who His Father is. He knows who He is. And instead of passing on the cross, instead of getting to the reward without the sacrifice and the obedience. He responds with this. He says, "Go away, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him.' And again, he's quoting Deuteronomy and Israel. They struggled. They forgot who God was. They didn't know who they were, and they begin to worship a golden calf. They begin to worship something they made, and oh my goodness, how often do we worship things we make? But Jesus, he wasn't going to compromise even for a moment to get the thing that he came for, because Jesus really does love every single person in all the kingdoms. It wasn't just about him having rain. It's because he's deeply in love with humanity. But he wasn't going to compromise. He wasn't going to take the shortcut. And the good news for you and me is Jesus. He passed the test, like he did it. He was faithful. Where everyone's been unfaithful, he was the faithful one. He did it all right. And fortunately for us, Jesus is not just an example, because if he was only an example, it means when you're in your wilderness seasons, it means you just need to suck it up, but her cup and trust God. Be like Jesus, but it's better than that because Jesus, He's not just an example; He's a provision. He was obedient through all of the testing, and this isn't the only moment that He had in the wilderness that's significant. Take a look at what happens next. This is a little bit later in Matthew. Jesus finds out some news. Says when Jesus heard about it, he withdrew from there and went by boat to a remote place to be alone. Now, what he had just heard about is that guy John that baptized him. John was murdered. He was beheaded. It was an awful death, and Jesus had just received this word, and Jesus and John, their stories were intertwined all the way to when their their moms were pregnant with them, and Jesus is fully human, and just found out that a dear person that he loved was murdered unjustly, and he's grieving. He's carrying the weight of this. He's like, I just have to get away for a little while. He goes to withdraw, and he heads off to a wilderness. And Jesus may be going to the wilderness just because he needs. To get away and be away from the crowds and away from the people, something I wonder. This isn't in the Bible, but I wonder if Jesus chose to go to the wilderness because he so closely associated John with the wilderness that the place it made most sense to grieve John's death is the wilderness. As Jesus goes to grieve, look at what happens. He went ashore, and he saw a large crowd. The people followed him, like he's trying to get away to grieve. He's carrying all this stuff, and all these people show up, and when he sees them, he had compassion on them. He saw them like sheep without a shepherd, and he spent the day with them and he healed their sick. This was a massive crowd of 1000s of people, and Jesus took the time to be with them, to meet them, to care for them. He had so much compassion, and he's tending to their wounds and healing the sick. I mean, Jesus is carrying all his stuff, his grief, and at the same time, he goes

and then begins to carry all the people. A whole day goes by because it's a big crowd. It's getting late, and the disciples are like, "Hey, we we've got a problem. So they go to Jesus.

Steve Frissell 26:31

They say, "Hey, this place is deserted. Like we're in the wilderness. There is nothing here. This place is deserted. It's already late. Send the crowds away so that they can go into the villages to buy some food for themselves, like we we just got to get this party like moving on. And Jesus, he's like, no, we're we're not stopping this party. We've got more to do here with these people. Look at what he says. They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat. The disciples don't know what to do with that. They go looking around. They find two fish and five loaves of bread. They bring it to Jesus. Jesus blesses it. He breaks the bread and he gives it to his disciples. Says, "Take this to them. He breaks it, and he gives more, and he keeps doing this. And he breaks the bread, passes it to them. They pass it to the people, and this crowd of 1000s ate until they were satisfied. Like they didn't just get enough to hold them over. It wasn't just like, "Hey, you get a couple bites, you get a couple bites, that'll do until we can get back. They ate until they had their fill. They couldn't eat anymore, and when it was all done, they collected 12 baskets of leftovers. So think about this. There was a time when Israel was in the wilderness, and God gave them their bread that they needed for that day. And here on this day, Jesus is in the wilderness with people, and He gives them bread in abundance, more than they could ever eat. And some of the people who had experienced this are processing it and wondering. John records this in his gospel. The next day, Jesus is with some of the people who are in that crowd, and they're going, "Hey, we we know our ancestors had this experience where God gave them bread in the wilderness, and and and we just had this experience with you with bread. They're trying to put it all together, and they're trying to figure out God. They're trying to figure out Jesus and what just happened. Look, says our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, and they're processing this with Jesus. And here's what Jesus says back to them. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. He expands on it. Says, "For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They're talking about bread, and they think Jesus is talking about bread, but then Jesus changes the conversation. He's not talking about bread anymore. He's talking about life. No, yeah, what your ancestors experienced, like yeah, that that was a bread thing. But listen, I want you to know this: that the Father brings life. And a little bit later, in this very conversation, Jesus makes this incredible claim that is absolutely true of Him. He says, "I am the bread of life. What you've always been hoping for, what you've always needed, what's always been the provision for people in the wilderness isn't something. It's someone. It's Jesus, the one." Who is the bread of life? I'm what you've always needed, and sure enough, just a little while after this moment, where Jesus makes this claim, he's at a table with his disciples, and he picks up some bread again. He blesses it, he breaks it, and he gives it to them. Matthew, Matthew 26. As they were eating, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take and eat. This is my body, the one who is the bread of life. Said to his disciples, "I am. I am. I am giving my body. What Jesus is doing, what he's saying, is I am the life. I am laying down my life. My body is being given for you, and His body was put up on a cross. But because Jesus is the bread of life, because He is fully life, death could not hold Him, and He overwhelmed death, defeated the grave, and He came and He brought that life to every single one of His followers.

Steve Frissell 31:17

So when we put our faith in Jesus, what He's been saying all along is, you will no longer be hungry because you will be resurrected to new life. Me, the bread of life, I will sustain you. And this is what we see: is that Jesus has always been the one with His people in the desert. It was Hagar when she was in the desert, alone, vulnerable, and He saw her there. Jesus saw her with Moses while he had run from all the things that he had done. God chased him down and gave him purpose in the wilderness. It was Jesus that came for Israel and led them with cloud and fire. His presence was there all along the way, guiding them and leading them for every single step. It was Jesus that was there, the God that provided their needs, the things that they needed when they were hungry and when they were thirsty. He was the one that met them with the provision. It was Jesus that went into the wilderness to be tested and was the one who was faithful and obedient, recognizing fully that he could trust the Father. It was Jesus who's grieving the loss of his loved one and sees people in need and has deep compassion for them and with a full of tenderness and empathy loves and cares for every single one of them. It was Jesus who gave his life on the cross. It was Jesus who defeated the grave, and it is Jesus who now gives this life to you and to me? And so, if you find yourself in a wilderness and you wonder if anyone sees you, Jesus sees you. If you find yourself wondering what is the purpose for your life while you're struggling in this wilderness, Jesus has purpose for you. If you find yourself hungry for life, but life just is leaving you disappointed, and you want something bigger and better. Jesus is there with you and for you in this wilderness. If you're wondering if the wilderness is ever going to end, Jesus, He's there.

He's guiding you. He's leading you, and He is not just going to leave you in the wilderness because the wilderness is not your destination. It is a place of formation, but there is a destination that you have. Jesus is taking you home. He's taking you home, and what he's wanting you to hear and see today, while you are in your wilderness, is he wants you to know you are free and you can trust me. I am here with you. I have so much compassion for you and tenderness toward you. Hear me. You are free and you can trust me. So right now, what we're going to do is we're going to look to Jesus, because understanding what to do when you're living in the wilderness is not like a three-part strategy of how to survive in the wilderness. There's just one thing we do: we look to Jesus. So we're going to worship together now, and we're going to look to Jesus. We've got some people from our prayer team that are going to be in the room, and and if you want to look to Jesus and have somebody intercede with you and pray for you, they will be here to pray with you over these two songs. But what we're going to do right now, whether it's in prayer or song, is we are not doing a momentary emotional escape from our wilderness. We're bringing our wilderness into this. Bring your doubts, bring your pain, bring your frustration, bring all the angst that you have, and bring it to Jesus because He is right here listening, and He has compassion and tenderness to you. He loves you, and He's telling you, you are free, and you can trust me. Let's stand and let's look to Jesus.