

Ephraim

by Francois Carr

This sermon reflects on the significance of Ephraim, a place of solitude and preparation in the life of Jesus before the events leading to his crucifixion. It emphasizes the importance of taking time away from the busyness of life to reflect, prepare for the future, and enjoy fellowship with loved ones. Just as Jesus withdrew to Ephraim, we too need moments of solitude to connect with God, gain perspective on our lives, and cherish moments with those we love.

Scripture: John 11:54, Acts 20:21, Mark 6:31, Psalm 46:10, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Matthew 14:23, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Hebrews 10:24, Philippians 4:6, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Solitude", "Preparation for the Future"

Description

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Transcript

To the northeast of Jerusalem, there's a region or a small city called Ephraim in biblical times. We read about this in the book of John chapter 11, where Jesus withdraws himself from Bethany and he took his disciples and they spend some time at this place. It all started in John chapter 10, where Jesus was teaching in Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of the Dedication and because they wanted to stone him, he had to withdraw himself and you can read that in John chapter 10, verse 40 to 42, where he spent some time across the Jordan River, not too far away from the place where John the baptized was baptizing and many came to Jesus there and they believed in him.

It was from that place that Jesus walked to Bethany and he spent some time there because of the sickness and the death of Lazarus. He raised him from the dead and because of the testimony of Lazarus, Jesus had to leave that place and make his way to this place called Ephraim. If you would look in the Bible, you find in the region of Ephraim, there's also a place called Baal Hazer.

It was famous in the times of Absalom as a place for sheep shearing in 2 Samuel chapter 13, verse 23. Also a place called Ephron is mentioned not far away from there in 2 Chronicles chapter 13, verse 19. In Joshua chapter 18, verse 23, it speaks about a place called Ophrah from the tribe of Benjamin, which is

not too far away from Bethel, which is also to the east of Jerusalem.

Now today, it's a Christian town, there's about 1,500 people living there with the Christian faith. The only place in Israel with so many Christian people together at the moment, I believe it's an Arab town, but it's called Tiber, T-A-Y-B-E, Tiber, and it's also mentioned in some places called Aphra, which is about 15 miles just outside of Jerusalem. If you would take the word Ophrah and you add the word Ephron and the word Aphra, it almost sounds like Ephraim.

You can kind of pronounce that word that you find. But you find this word in John chapter 11, verse 54. Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with his disciples.

It was from that place that Jesus went back into Bethany six days before the Passover. Now this coming Sunday is Palm Sunday. That means that tomorrow Jesus entered into Bethany.

That means today, which is Friday, the 26th of March, 2021, today then, Jesus finds himself in this place with his disciples. So why is this important and what did they do there? I thought about Paul at one time in his life where Paul was sending Luke and the other disciples to go to the seashore, a place called Assos, and where they would catch a boat and sail from there to different stops as they made their way into Caesarea and from there to Jerusalem. And Paul knew that from this moment onwards he will be caught and eventually imprisoned.

So Paul chose not to walk and to go or to sail, at least from Troas to Assos, but to walk by foot. It's 21 miles on the Roman road down to the south. Why did Paul wanted to walk 21 miles alone? I think that maybe he wanted to just to reflect upon what happened, the revival in Ephesus that took place, the spreading of the gospel in Asia Minor and into Europe.

Or maybe Paul was just reflecting and preparing his heart and mind for what's laying ahead of him. And if you look at the message in chapter 20, 21, where Paul speak to the elders of Ephesus, you understand some of what he was saying that was going through his heart and his mind in that moment. So maybe Jesus was doing the same.

He had to leave Bethany because of the Jews. And so he wanted to be alone because his time has not come yet to be caught and to be crucified. And he wanted to be on the right time limit of his father.

But maybe there was a second reason that was to prepare himself for what is coming, not so much on Saturday, but from Sunday onwards, the preparation for Jerusalem, which is ahead of him. But also then there's, I believe there's a third reason, that's to spend some time with his disciples. That was the last time that they would be together alone in solitude, in silence, just to be away from the masses and all the people that wanted to see them the whole time.

And just to touch Jesus, that he can just be with his disciples, the ones that he loved so much. And just to have some quality time to have breakfast, lunch and dinner and just to sit and to chat, maybe have a joke or maybe share something with him from his heart about what is coming, what's laying ahead, or maybe just the final preparation before he will release them eventually with a great commission. But what does it mean for you and for I? Sometimes we have to separate ourselves also from the busyness of life, from the stoning, from the persecution, from the hardship, the trials, all the temptations, just to be alone in the wilderness.

You read so many times how Jesus withdraws himself into the wilderness. And sometimes you and I need just the time alone in stillness and solitude and silence that we can reflect upon what's happening in our own lives and pay attention to that. Or maybe just to to prepare ourselves for what lies ahead in next week, next month, next year.

We don't know the future, but God knows. And sometimes we just need to be alone that we can touch base with him and connect and just to stop, reflect and reconnect again that we can get his perspective of what is the next season for your life and for mine. Or maybe just like in the case of Jesus, because of the uncertainty of the future, is to spend some quality time with our loved ones and friends and family members and and build some memories and just enjoy one another and just live for today, because tomorrow we might not be together anymore.

So we all need an Ephraim in our lives, a time to be away from the busyness of life or even a time just to to prepare ourselves for the day of tomorrow or simply just a time to have fellowship and communion with one another. May God use this time in these moments in the life of Jesus, from this moment until Jerusalem, the death, the resurrection, until Jesus went to be with his father and the Great Commission, all this together. May Ephraim be a place which is real for you too, a place of solitude, to be alone, to prepare yourself, but also at the same time to enjoy quality fellowship with your loved ones.

May God bless you in this time, in this season that we enter as we reflect upon Easter weekend, where Jesus died for you and for me on the cross on Calvary. And may God bless you.

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