

To Prove Thee in the Wilderness - Part 3

by Walter Beuttler

Walter Beuttler's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's ways and the spiritual growth that comes from navigating the wilderness experiences of life.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:15, Deuteronomy 29:29, Job 23:3, Jeremiah 9:23, Romans 8:28, Philippians 3:10, 1 Peter 5:6

Topics: "God's Character", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

Walter Beuttler preaches about the importance of knowing and understanding the ways of the Lord, emphasizing that true glory comes from understanding and knowing God's character of loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness. He explains that while God is infinite and some things remain a mystery, God desires to be known and understood within the revealed truths in the Bible. Beuttler shares personal stories and biblical examples to illustrate how God leads His people through wilderness experiences to humble them, prove them, and ultimately do them good at their latter end, even when facing perils like unbelief, rebellion, and murmuring.

Transcript

We are in the subject area of the Ways of the Lord. Moses prayed; "Show me now Thy way that I may know Thee," and we are told that God revealed His ways to Moses. I have also mentioned from Hebrews that God is grieved because His people do not know His ways. For this reason, God is often misunderstood. I am going to read to you in conjunction with this from Jeremiah 9:23-24:

"Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord."

Here the Lord is encouraging us, in fact, He is exhorting us that if we are to do any glorying, we should not glory in our wisdom, our knowledge, our educational achievements, however fine they might be. Neither should we glory in our might, whatever power or authority we might exercise. We are not to glory in our bank account.

What we are asked to glory in, is two things: "that he understands and knows Me." This glorying is not a proud boasting. Rather, it is a sincere open rejoicing. We are to glory in the fact that we understand and know God.

God, of course, is infinite. For this reason God can never be fully understood or known. Finiteness cannot encompass infinity, no more than we can put the Pacific Ocean in a teacup. But as far as God has revealed, we may know and understand Him. God divides truth into two great categories. In Deuteronomy we read:

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." Deuteronomy 29:29

Notice the two parts: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." There are things concerning God that are none of our business. God has kept that to Himself. For instance, God has not revealed the nature of the Trinity. He has never explained how there can be three distinct persons in the Godhead, yet being only one God. "The Lord your God is one God." He has never explained this.

God has never explained how sin came about, originally. We know where sin in Adam came. We also know that Lucifer, the greatest of God's creation, sinned because of pride. Where did he get his pride from? We know he became proud of himself, but that is an effect of a prior cause. The cause is not given.

God has not explained how He could be the Everlasting God, without beginning and without ending. You and I cannot comprehend a being or an existence of anything without an original beginning. We cannot conceive of eternity. God has never tried to explain this.

God has not revealed many things about Himself. In the Bible, God is presented as a person, a divine person, without youth, or old age. God has no age. He never was young. He never will be old. He is without youth or old age, without beginning or ending. We cannot conceive of such an existence, and if we are smart, we will not try to.

"But, those things which are revealed, belong to us," and within the sphere of these things, God has chosen to reveal, a revelation written in this Book, within this sphere we may understand and know God. God can be understood. He desires to be understood. He can be known. He desires to be known.

Again in Jeremiah, "I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord." In other words, God wants us to know His loving kindness, and His judgment.

We have the nicest God there ever was. I think He is great. Some twenty two years ago, the Lord gave me a definite call to go and teach all nations. That is why I am traveling each year.

In the early days, I went by way of the Atlantic most often. The flights were not as long as they are now. Usually, it was to Europe, a little bit into Africa. Just like everybody, I like a little variety. I would always go of necessity, New York to London; New York to Rome; New York to Frankfurt; New York to Paris. And I got tired of going more or less the same way all the time. You know you can get tired of anything, especially traveling.

From a childhood on, I was intrigued for some reason by the Azores. I wanted to see the Azores. I could not stop there, because at that time the airlines had tourist class travel only for what was then known as the Northern Route. What was known as the Southern Route to the Mediterranean, by way of the Azores, was for first-class travel only. For economic reasons, I traveled tourist class so I could not stop in the Azores.

One year, I went to Rome, Italy and had all my plans made. I even had laid them before the Lord to get a witness to make sure I was going the right way. I wanted to be in the Lord's will, even to the routes that I was taking. I had such a witness from the Lord, that inner rest and tranquility, so I knew that all was well, all was in the center of His will. I think I went New York, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Zurich, Rome.

One morning I picked up "The Philadelphia Inquirer" and here was an article, "Airlines Opening up Azores Route to Tourist Class Travelers to Europe." I thought, "Oh, I missed it. Here I could have gone by way of the Azores with no extra fare." I went back to my heavenly Father. I said, "Father, did You perchance read The Philadelphia Inquirer?"

This is exactly how I pray. I do not pray ecclesiastical prayers, like some do, when they want to make an impression, more upon the people than upon God. Who wants ecclesiastical prayers?

So I prayed just the way I told you, "Did You perchance read The Philadelphia Inquirer?" Please do not say, "He did not have to read it. He knew what was involved." I know that too, but you leave me alone, as my prayers work. I added, "Father, just look at this. I could have gone by way of the Azores, but I know that I am in Your perfect will to go the Northern Route. Father, how about letting me go, by way of the Azores." And the Lord gave me such a witness, no words, only a witness, but I understood what the witness meant.

The witness meant, "If you would rather go by way of the Azores, get your ticket changed. It makes no difference to Me." So I got it changed. All right, there was nothing special about the Azores, but my curiosity got satisfied. It was only a refueling stop in the middle of the night, but still I got to go by way of the Azores.

I came back to school at the end of the summer and told the class what had happened. I mentioned how good the Lord was, and His loving kindness when He let me change my route. When I got done with my story there was an utterance in tongues and interpretation. The interpretation was very close to this wording.

Obviously God was listening, as He is tonight. "God is pleased when He sees that He can please His children, for God loves to show His loving kindness to His children..." and so it went on giving to us the obvious pleasure of God. When God saw that I was pleased with His loving kindness, then He was pleased because I was pleased, so we were all pleased. Apparently God believes what has often been said, "Joys not shared are only half enjoyed."

God wants us to know Him. He loves to get us to know Him in His loving kindness for God is so kind and so good. No wonder Moses prayed, "Show me now thy way, that I may know thee."

Now, "the way of the Lord in the wilderness." This morning we saw God leading His people by the cloud, the glory of God, into the wilderness. Often we speak, or think of God's leadings, but He leads into all sorts of things. The Spirit led the Lord into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And there are times where God leads us into situations that are not pleasant, but will do a work in us which could not be done in any other way.

You know we are a strange people. We think that everything ought to come fast. We are in the age of instant: instant love, instant marriage, instant wealth, instant security, instant everything. The world is full of instants - more and more. But there is a work to be done in us that cannot be done in an instant. God

has to put us into a given situation, and sometimes, He puts us between the hammer and the anvil.

First He puts us in the fire, and there we holler "Oh God, get me out." After awhile He brings us out and puts us on the anvil and down comes the hammer, "Ouch, this is not what I meant!" The Lord says, "Well, that is what I meant." God has a work to be done in us. What a pain we are to the Lord, when He tries to bring us into the likeness of His Son. For this, at times He has to lead us into a wilderness, a place in which we just do not know where we are at. We cannot understand, or explain it. We are at our wit's end.

We mentioned this morning that this wilderness is a place of perils. There are dangers. We enumerated some. It can be a place of defeat, the perils being unbelief. We talked about that. Lastly, we mentioned rebellion. We can rebel against God in the wilderness.

One year, I almost rebelled against the Lord because I did not want to travel anymore. You know you get fed up with this traveling. I did not want to go. I wanted to stay home, and I found my heart approaching what is not far from rebelling. I checked Beuttler right away. We have to be so careful with this rebellion. I gave you quite a story this morning about what happened to me. I will not repeat that of course.

Another one of those perils is murmuring, grumbling, which means speaking complainingly, often in an undertone, "Why doesn't the Lord keep His word? Here is His promise. I quoted it to the Lord. 'Lord, you said You would do such and so. Now Lord I demand that You fulfill Your word.'" We clobber God over the head with His Book, "You said. Where is the promise Lord?"

Can any one of us honestly say that we have never grumbled, complained, speaking complainingly, in an undertone? "Why does not the Lord undertake? Why did the Lord let this and that happen? Why did the Lord not prevent? Here is a promise. Why does not the Lord fulfill it quickly? Where is the Lord?"

Job said: "Oh that I knew where I might find Him." Job was in deep trouble. He could not account for his sickness. He no longer had any awareness of the Presence of God. He groped for God in the dark. Where is He?

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; On the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." Job 23:3, 8-9

Job was a godly, righteous man by God's own testimony, in great distress. He was battered in his body by the devil, cursed by his wife, forsaken by his friends, pushed to the side by the young people (Chapter 29), the object of the devil's hatred, yet God stands in the shadows. Satan was also standing in the shadows hoping Job would curse God in his distress. God was hoping that he would not. Job was in the center of the arena with God and Satan in the bleachers as the spectators. It was up to Job now to vindicate God by his conduct in distress, or hand the great victory to the devil so the devil could look into the face of God and laugh.

Here was this man groping, "Oh God where are you? God where are you? God, answer me." And all he got was a mocking echo. God would not speak. He had to let the drama go on to vindicate His name. We are told in Job that in all these things, Job sinned not with his lips. God and Satan were waiting for Job to say something by way of deprecation of God and handing Satan the palm of victory, BUT HE DID NOT.

God listened. He hears the murmuring, the complaining, the questioning, "Why doesn't God answer our prayers?"

"I don't know, I wondered myself."

"Say old man, do you think something's wrong?"

"Goodness knows, I don't."

Now I am taking you to Deuteronomy 8 where Moses is speaking to Israel:

"Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought you forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that He might humble you, and that He might prove you, to do you good at your latter end." Deuteronomy 8:15-16

"Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness." Hallelujah! When we are going through the wilderness, He is still leading.

You may grumpily say, "Well, I cannot see it." But, you may not see it, but you can believe it. This was the problem with them. They did not believe God in the wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, scorpions, drought, no water... "Who fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers knew not, that He might humble you."

Did you know that there is such a thing as God humbling us? Who wants to be humble?" But I do know that God wants His people to be humble. Moses was the humblest man on the earth. I think he probably was that for keeps. "That he might humble you." Some of us need a pin in our bubble. There are people who think they are growing when all they are doing is swelling. "To humble you." You know it is so easy to let pride, conceit, and what have you, develop in our nature, and sooner or later, God has to deal with it.

I know we have had girls in our Bible school who spent more time looking in the mirror admiring themselves, than they did waiting on the Lord. Pride of face, pride of dress, pride of social standing, pride of goodness knows what. There is pride that is of a thousand and one varieties. I think that some of you have heard me relate, but I will repeat it briefly.

Madam Guyon was a woman of known beauty, regarded as the greatest beauty in Paris in her day, whom they called a religious mystic. She was a deeply spiritual woman who knew the Lord beyond many. Those of you who like to read, if you get your hands on the book, "The Life of Madam Guyon." This book is worth its weight in gold. Do not let it go.

She was a woman of exquisite beauty. She knew she was pretty and loved to look in the mirror. She was seeking the Lord and wanted more of God. The Lord brought to her attention her pride of face. She loved the admiration of people. Not only men, but women would give her a second look on the streets of Paris because of her beauty. She wanted to do away with that pride, but she could not. She even prayed the Lord would deliver her from this pride, because it was hindering her progress in God, but it would not go. Pride is a powerful thing.

One day she challenged God, "God, do You mean to tell me You are not powerful enough to take pride out of my heart when I do not want to have anything to do with it?" This time He listened. She got sick, and got smallpox. Her face was full of pox. Her friends told her they knew of salves that she could use to save her face from being pox marked. She said, "No, I want no salves. God is answering my prayer."

God saved her life, but not her face. When all was over, her face was full of smallpox holes. She looked in the mirror and was astonished at the sight. Her beauty was gone, but so was her pride. God had answered her prayer. Apparently it was the only way in which she could get rid of pride. God uses, when need be, all kinds of means as much as need be to take pride out of our hearts.

We experienced a revival in school. The revival lasted about ten days. Three of these days were used in public confessions in our chapel. Many of the students would come up, stand behind the mike and confess pride - various kinds of pride. I was in charge of the meetings and had to keep things in order. I had known of this principle that when God deals with us to make confession of things done, or stolen, said, or whatever. The circle of the confession should never be greater than the circle of the offense. I see from some of your looks you do not quite grasp it.

I will share an example. Among these confessions, one of our married students stood up and made a confession of adultery. Now that was a great mistake and I had to deal with him on that. He had no business to make a confession like that before the whole student body. They were not involved. That was a matter between him, his wife, the third party and his God. It had nothing to do with the student body. The circle of confession should have been kept between the parties involved. Now he spread it over the whole school. That was not necessary.

Here the students confessed pride. "I want to confess that my heart is filled with pride because I am among those students who have the highest grades." This seemed to have nothing to do with the others. That was between them and God.

I went to the Lord about it. I said, "Father, will You tell me something please. I know that the circle of the confession should not be greater than the circle of the offense. Why do these students have to make a public confession for a state of pride in which others are not affected?"

And the Lord gave me the answer, "Pride does affect others, either directly or indirectly. But the main reason for the public confession of pride was that few people can be delivered from pride apart from the experience of public humiliation." You can think that over, and do with it what you like, but I can see it. This pride has such roots in us that God cannot simply pull it out. It has to be destroyed through a public confession when God leads to do such a thing. I think there ought to be some kind of a prompting to do that. Anyhow, the Lord takes us through situations to humble us.

I was a young preacher and had my first series of meetings, after Bible school. I heard the people talk, "Brother Beuttler, my what truth! Did you hear Brother Beuttler? You should have heard him. My, that fellow is good." And I liked what they said. I liked what I heard. I could not help but overhear. I was asked to stay a second week.

I used a little outline like I have here. I thought, "If they find out I am using an outline, they will not think I am so great." So I was carefully hiding it below my little Bible so they could not see it. I wanted them to think I was speaking, using all those scriptures extemporaneously. It was a hot day. People had put in a big fan on the platform in the corner. I was over there on the other side preaching, walking around like a caged lion.

As I turned around, I saw my outline in the air fluttering down in front of the pulpit and dropping to the floor. I had to go all the way up to the other end where the steps were and go down, walk over, bend myself in the sight of all the congregation, and pick it up. I have been hiding no more outlines. It is the faithfulness of

God that He sticks a pin in us before He has to use a sledgehammer. God gets us into situations and deals with us to humble us.

In the school, we had a lady who was a great talker. She had a sharp tongue. She could bite and sting like a scorpion. She would talk about people in such a way in her camp cottage that people walked around her cottage so they would not hear what they did not want to hear. If you were sick, or went to a doctor, or even took Aspirin, in her opinion you went straight to hell. She let that tongue go against anybody that went for medical help.

One day she did not feel good, and got worse. She saw me on the campus and said, "Brother Beuttler, what do you think of a person going to the doctor, just to find out what might be wrong?" I knew right away what was up.

I said, "I do not think that would do anyone any harm." She said, "Well you know, I have come to think the same way." She went to the doctor and what he found was so bad that he put her in the hospital right away and was in the hospital for quite some time. I forgot what she had, but it was very serious. Finally she returned from the hospital and we passed each other again, as we often did on the campus. We exchanged greetings and talked.

She said, "Brother Beuttler, I must tell you something. You heard that I had an operation didn't you?" I said, "Yes, everybody heard that." She said, "I had surgery, but I want to tell you something. When they performed surgery in my body, God also performed surgery in my spirit. God has delivered me from the spirit of judgment. I have nothing more to say when other people get sick, go to the doctor, or take medicine. God has cured me from the spirit of judgment."

But she had to go through this wilderness of surgery, if you please, so that God had an opportunity to get at her critical spirit. I would venture to guess that God had no way of delivering her in any other way. She had to go through it and be publicly humiliated.

Everybody knew she was the one who was critical of anyone who even took an Aspirin. He had to go to the hospital to humble her. God has more to do than to crown us with glory. There is more to the Christian life than to be crowned with glory. Hallelujah! but there will come a time when we will not feel like rejoicing. We will ask for grace to hold steady under the knife of the Divine Surgeon when He performs some spiritual surgery to deliver us from a spiritual disease. Sometimes God is obliged to shorten some tongues. It may well take some Divine surgery in a hard place.

"That He might humble you, and that He might prove you." You know how people can sing; "I'll go with Him through the garden?" This has yet to be demonstrated.

I will go with him through the judgment. God hears us singing. "Where He leads me, I will follow." Then He leads us up a hill to a cross and says, "This is for you." "ME! I want the glory." "That will come after the death."

Do people ever nail you to your cross with their tongue? Do they ever pierce your hands with their tongue over the things you do? Do they ever pierce your feet the way you walk and where you go? Do they ever criticize what you are doing, where you are going with their tongue?

God watches. We might angrily say, "Well, as soon as I get out of this, I am going to give them hell." Oh yea? Is that what the Master said? He said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Somebody said, "That Brother Beuttler! He will not stay home from going overseas until he breaks his legs." This was said to my daughter. She replied, "That would not do any good. He would go in a wheelchair!"

People want you to fail so they can gloat over you. We sing, "I will go with you through the judgment." People tear you into pieces with an acid tongue. You get bitterly criticized for doing the will of God, or doing the will of God in a way different from what they want you to do.

Tomorrow morning is communion. We put our hands to the cup. By doing so we testify that we are ready to partake of the sufferings of the Master - the fellowship of his sufferings. The Lord puts us to the test to see how we act and react when the chips are down.

"And to do thee good at your latter end." In our trials, wilderness experiences, all sorts of happenings, God always has in mind our latter end - "to do you good at your latter end." What God does to us, for us, with us, and by us, is directly related to our latter end. God works today in view of our latter end to do us good. For it is the end which will last throughout all eternity. Today's trials, wildernesses, or whatever must be understood, and if not understood, endured in confidence, that God has in mind the end, our ultimate good, and therefore, "all things work together for good to those who love the Lord," and do not call it quits, until He is done with His job.

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