

On the Edge of the Wilderness

2.7.2021

Exodus

Message 6

Exodus 13:20–22 (CSB)

²⁰They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹The LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel day or night. ²²The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people.

1. The Edge of the Wilderness.

A. With this simple phrase, Israel's slavery in Egypt is over.

1. They stand at the edge of their freedom.
2. They gaze into the wilderness, a land most have never seen, and become aware that freedom has come.

B. The wilderness is not their destination.

1. God is leading them through the wilderness with purpose.
2. There are lessons to be learned and encounters to experience that only happen in wilderness places.
3. These lessons and experiences will help transform these former slaves into a Nation of priests.

C. The past year or so, I have noticed that this kind of message resonates with us.

1. Many of us feel that we are on the edge, on the verge, of God doing something bigger and greater than we have ever imagined.
2. We are not the same person we were a year ago.

3. We are chomping at the bit to put the old behind us and embrace the fullness of God's calling for us.

4. But instead, God leads us to the edge of a Wilderness and says, "I'm going to lead you a different way."

D. Israel had never been that way before, but God had a unique plan on how to lead His people.

2. The Lord went ahead of them...

A. This phrase excites me.

1. The idea that God loves His people enough to not only tell them where to go but to lead them is impressive.

2. No other religion or god is depicted as being involved in human affairs like this.

3. God did not merely tell the people where to go, but He went with them and ahead of them.

B. When God gives you direction, He does not leave you by yourself.

1. Instead, He goes with you.

2. He guides you.

3. Wherever God calls you to go, He goes with you.

C. As God calls us to new places and new heights, we are assured of God's presence and help.

1. The Hebrew for "pillar" means "something standing".ⁱ

2. For the next 40 years, Israel would be led by a standing cloud and a standing fire.

3. Their journey would have supernatural origins.

A. This Hebrew phrase adds some depth.

1. Not just a cloud and not just a fire.

2. But Something Standing like a cloud and like a fire.

3. The writer of Exodus is telling us it was God Himself who was leading Israel on this journey.

a. When Israel looked up in the morning, God was there, standing like a cloud.

b. When Israel went to bed at night, there was the fire of God protecting them as they laid down their heads.

B. This isn't the first time God showed up like this.

1. When Moses was in Midian in Exodus 3, God showed Himself to Moses.

2. On that day, God revealed Himself in a fire and a burning bush.

a. On that day, God assured Moses that it would be God leading him in delivering Israel from Egypt's powers.

b. And now, at the edge of the Wilderness, God shows up in Fire and Cloud to tell all the people that God is in the lead.

C. Sometimes, we all need some assurance.

1. We need assurance that God hasn't quit us.

2. We need assurance that God hasn't left us.

3. We need assurance that God is still there.

a. For Israel's journey, God showed up in a fire and cloud.

b. For the believer's journey, God has given us Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

c. We often struggle in our journey because we have stopped looking toward the Spirit.

d. We complain that God isn't leading us, but we fail to look up and see.

e. If you can't see God leading you, maybe you need to change where you are looking.

D. God's leading should distinguish our decision making from the world.

1. What separated the Israelites from Egypt was God and His Presence.
2. Our journey should be different than those around us.
 - a. I'm thankful that the world has noticed the difference between Christian companies like Hobby Lobby and Chick-Fil-A.
 - b. I'm thankful that the world has noticed the high level of integrity among not-for-profits like Convoy of Hope.
3. The Christian's journey is not different because we do not have the same problems as those around us.
 - a. Our journey is different because God is actively involved in our lives.
 - b. And He is leading us somewhere special.

4. The Glory of God was leading Israel somewhere special.

A. Moses stood with God at the edge of the wilderness.

1. These next steps would launch a Nation on a journey like no other.
2. Moses may not have known the path God would choose, but He knew who was leading.
3. As believers, we do not always get to choose our exact path or route.
4. But we know who is leading us.
5. And God leads us with purpose, even when it seems like we are going in circles.

B. God had declared part of His plan to Moses in Exodus 3:12.

1. This was when God captivated Moses by the fire in the bush.

2. On that day, Moses caught a tiny glimpse of God and His power.

Exodus 3:12 (CSB)

¹²He answered, "I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain."

3. God declared that a sign of His leading would be Israel coming to the same Mountain that Moses had met God.

a. In other words: God was leading His people to Himself.

b. This was more than follow the leader: this was follow the Glory.

c. And God's glory would be part of Israel's existence every step of the journey.

C. Even when the day felt ordinary, there was nothing ordinary about it.

1. Each day, God clothed himself with the cloud and with the fire.

a. When the cloud or fire moved, the people would move.

b. When the glory stayed, the people stayed.

2. In Numbers, when the Tabernacle was finished, that Glory would rest and rise from above the Tabernacle.

a. **When you follow God, there are no ordinary days.**

b. Every day doesn't have to be spectacular, but they all are supernatural.

5. Exodus 13 reminds me that I cannot walk alone.

A. **I cannot go where God is calling me on my own.**

1. I cannot go into the wilderness on my own: I need Jesus.

2. Daily I am being reminded of how much I need Jesus.
 - a. Without Him, I am lost and without direction.
 - b. Without Him, I would return to the familiarity of sin.
3. I cannot face the wilderness alone.

B. This week, I talked with a friend, outside of this church who is facing a dire situation.

1. Without her knowing our sermon series she wrote this to me:
2. I'm not seeing the direction we're going- I'm just trying to follow the pillar of fire...and not complain!
3. My friends, some of you find yourself on the edge of the wilderness.
 - a. You may not see or understand the direction, but follow the Glory of God.
 - b. It may seem as though God is leading you in the wrong direction.
 1. But He is leading you with purpose.
 2. He may be leading you to a greater encounter with Him.

C. There is a progression in God's revelation.

1. At first, it was a small fire in a bush.
2. Then a pillar of fire and cloud.
3. Then, at Mt. Sinai, God came down in such splendor and power that all the people heard the voice of God and saw the Glory cloud envelope the Mountain, and the fire of God was displayed.
4. God has a plan for the process, but you must trust Him and start-steppin.

ⁱ Cole, R. Alan. *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 2. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.