



Sermon – January 3, 2021
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Verses Covered This Week

Deuteronomy 8:1 - 17

Well, howdy! Good morning. It's good to see you in the new year. It's a joy and an honor to get to stand in for Phillip this morning. And church family, it's always a treasure to get to open up the word with you. And so, in light of that, in light of the text that we've got to cover, I don't have a fancy introduction for you. I just want you to grab your Bibles and we're going to dive straight on in. If you will turn to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8. Deuteronomy, chapter 8. Start at the beginning: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the eighth chapter. And I realize that we, we stand at the beginning of a new year. And we're going to find in the text today that the people of Israel found themselves standing at the beginning of a new chapter. They were transferring leadership from Moses, who had led them, who was a pillar in the faith, to Joshua. They were moving from a period of, of an entire generation knowing only the wilderness and nomadic lifestyle to moving into the land of promise as conquerors and dwellers. They stood at a time of change. And Moses is preparing them for this and he is giving them a charge reminding them throughout the book of Deuteronomy, it's really essentially his final sermon. They stand on the eastern side of the Jordan River waiting to hear the final words before they cross the river and will take control of the promised land as you find in the book of Joshua. And here's what Moses says. He says:

¹“All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be very careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give your forefathers.

This sets the tone. This is what his entire message has been. He said, “I am charging you today, people of Israel, that your life would be conformed to the commands that I have spent all this time giving you from the Lord. That your life would be conformed. That those would be lived out and that in living those out, you would experience what God has promised you under the covenant He made with you. That is, that you would have life. That you would multiply. That you would go in and take the land and fulfil not just God's covenant with you, but go in all the way back to God's covenant with Abraham.” That there would be a people, a life, that they would be great in number, multiply. That they would have a land, go in and possess. And church family, the same is for you and I today. We're not under the old covenant. We don't

have a literal promised land to inhabit. But today as we enter into the new year, we are charged from the Lord, no different than we are any other day of the year and any other day of our lives. That we would conform our lives to the command of Christ, to the pattern of His word. And that in doing so, we would then experience the fullness of the salvation from the new covenant that we have in the blood of Jesus. It goes on. It says:

²You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commandments or not. ³He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every utterance that proceeds out of the mouth of God. ⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. ⁵Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his sons. ⁶Therefore, you shall keep the commands of the Lord your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him.

Here's what he says. He says, Israelites, as you prepare to move into this new chapter, and as I am charging you to follow and honor, to follow the commands, I'm calling you to walk with God faithfully, here's what I want you to do. I want you to remember. To remember, not just anything, but to remember the wilderness you have spent the last forty years dwelling in. The wilderness that you were, that your fathers. If you back up, people of Israel, this is not the first time they've gone in to take the land. Forty years prior, they sent twelve spies. The twelve spies came back. Joshua and Caleb said, "God's got us. The land's great. There's powerful people there, but God's got us." And the other ten said, "Nope. We can't do it. We don't trust the Lord." And all the people sided with those ten. And the discipline in their lives, the discipline in their lives was that that generation God allowed to die off over these forty years. To raise up a new generation that has only known the wilderness. He says, "I want you to remember the Lord your God has led you." It's the first thing I want you to remember is that your God is sovereign over the wilderness. You catch that? I want you to think about. Maybe in Sunday school you heard this or maybe it's common. The wilderness wanderings. Church family, Israel did not wander in the desert. Israel was led in the desert. They were not there wandering aimlessly, trying to find a way out, walking purposelessly. They were there by the sovereign hand of their God. Their God is the one who sovereignly led them into that wilderness. Their God is the one who sovereignly kept and preserved them in that wilderness. Their God is the one who, who sovereignly is now guiding them out of that wilderness. God, God is the one who leads them in the wilderness. God is the one who has led them in the wilderness. The wilderness, it's not just that He's God in the wilderness, as if the wilderness is something separate, is something awful. It's not that He's God of the wilderness as if all He does is wilderness. But He is God over the wilderness. And church family, we need to remember this. We need to remember this so that we can actually embrace the reality of God and His wilderness. You see, because there is a pattern in Scripture. There is a pattern in Scripture from the very beginning. God delights to use the wilderness in the life of His children. You say, "Well what's a wilderness?" Well wilderness for them was a literal wilderness. It was a desert; rocky, barren. There was no water. There were minimal food resources. There were attackers from all sides. It was a place filled, later on in the text it says, a place that was terrible, that was fearful. A place that had fiery serpents and scorpions which is not snakes that light up on fire and glow like a glow stick. It's

snakes whose bite is painful, is fiery. This was a rough place. But a wilderness is essentially this: a wilderness is a place, a season, a prolonged period of time where the Lord leads you and I into a place where our weaknesses are heightened and exposed. Where resources and things we deem necessary for life seem minimal. And these can take a variety of different patterns. There are, there are seasons, wildernesses of spiritual dryness, where in our pursuit of God and our pursuit of the Lord it seems that reading Scripture's like eating sandpaper and our prayers bounce off the ceiling and it doesn't match up with what we expect in the mountaintop we assume. There's seasons of exhaustion, wildernesses where God leads you and I into places where we are stretched thin no matter how faithful we walk. And it seems that our weaknesses are heightened. There are wildernesses, seasons, of loneliness where the community that we expect around us is simply not there. There are wildernesses, there are seasons of frustrated and disappointed plans where we've been praying and asking for direction but God seems silent. Where we've been walking and moving what we think was the Lord's leadership and all doors seem closed. And there are wildernesses of suffering where we are experiencing trials and tribulations, not as a result of our own sin, it's simply because we've been following the Lord. We find all these wildernesses in Scripture. We find these wildernesses all throughout individuals in Scripture. Abraham was given a promise and then 25 years go by before that promise is fulfilled. Moses was prepared at the age of forty, according to the book of Acts, to lead the people of Israel out of the promised land yet he spent forty years in the desert shepherding sheep that God might break him. We see Joseph, fifteen years likely in prison. We see David, called and anointed king, told he is the king of Israel. And then spends 15 years hiding in the wilderness for his life. We see the apostle Paul, 13 years from the time he is saved to the time that he steps out as a missionary. And more than anyone, we see in the life of our own Savior, thirty years lived in complete and total obscurity, that the book of Hebrews describes as a place he learned obedience through what He suffered. You see, church family, the wilderness is God's pattern. God is going to lead you and I into places of wilderness. Not because of a result of our sin, but because He is sovereign over the wilderness and uses it in our life for a purpose.

And this is the second thing we see as we remember what is the wilderness. Look at the text. He says, remember all the way in which the Lord your God has led you. Why? That He might humble you, testing you. We see that the purpose of God in the wilderness is to humble and test His people. The word test there is the idea of putting under hardship to expose what is actually inside of something. To see the true state of something. The word humble is a harsh word. Means to bring somebody low, to humiliate, to oppress, to reduce someone in rank or status in order to make them feel completely dependent upon. This is God's purpose in the wilderness. And if this is God's purpose, then what we have to acknowledge as we remember God's purpose in the wilderness, no different than the Israelites is that the wilderness is hard. It is painful. It is not a place of ease nor should we put rose colored glasses on and describe it as this glowing place. The wilderness is harsh. It's harsh and hard because it can be long. Have you thought about, you have a generation of Israelites who reject God. Why didn't God just kill them all off right then? Let's just get them out. You might say, "Well, He needs parents to continue to raise the kids to get a new generation." That's valid. But could it also be that God's purpose in the wilderness wasn't simply to remove this generation that rejected Him, but it was to spend 40 years raising and training a new generation, teaching a new generation to be completely and totally dependent upon Him alone; 40 years. Just to give you some frames of reference for how long 40 years is, this time 40 years ago, we were two weeks away from Ronald Reagan assuming

office for his first term. This time 40 years ago we didn't know Darth Vader was Luke's father. This time 40 years ago we had eight more years to go before I ever came about. 40 years. God's wilderness periods in our life can be long. And there is a difficult reality in that. But remember this. God is not at work in your life and my life for a quick substitution. He is working from eternity and for eternity and He will take every last drop of time He needs to bring you and I to a place of humility having tested our heart. It's not just hard because it's long; it's hard because the wilderness is painful. We've mentioned, this is a desert land. There's painful, painful realities. Painful snakes. Painful scorpions. A lack of water. A lack of food. Not only that, but look what it says. It says, He humbled you and God let you be hungry. Literally, God allowed you to starve. Process that with me. When you go back in the book of Exodus, the people of Israel come into the desert, come into the wilderness. They find that there is no food. And they begin to grumble and murmur and they're saying, "God has brought us out here simply to die. We wish we could go back to being slaves in Egypt." But then what does God do? He says, "In the evenings I'm going to send birds to bring you meat. And in the mornings you're going to wake up and there's going to be My manna from heaven over the ground. And each morning you're to go out and you're to take only what you need for that day. No more, no less. Because I want you to understand it's Me and Me alone that provides. See, the wilderness can be painful because it can involve suffering, sorrow. It involves frustrated plans and broken dreams. It's a place where we are picked up by God and our backs of self-reliance are broken. It's also hard because it doesn't fit our expectations. Can you imagine being an Israelite? Here you've been in slavery for several hundred years. You've cried out to God. God has now delivered you in the most miraculous way. Not only has He delivered you in a miraculous way with the parting of the sea, with ten plagues, but the people of Israel have literally paid you to leave. The people of Egypt have paid you to leave. "God, You've delivered us. Thank you!" Now wouldn't you expect if God's going to deliver you from slavery, He'd take you to this nice, luscious, green pasture with a calm stream? Yet where is the first place God takes those people He's just delivered? To the wilderness. See, a lot of times our expectations, the reason the wilderness is hard is our expectations. I remember clearly in my life a pivotal moment where God had just exposed two idols of sin in my life where He had called them out. Where I had responded in repentance. Where there was a zeal and a passion to seek the Lord in a faithfulness of walking daily that had yet not been seen in my life. And you want to know what the next year was? Dry spiritually. Felt like the Lord was silent. Felt like I only heard the Lord twice that year. Both times saying, "You will trust Me and walk by faith." See, the wilderness was hard because it doesn't meet expectations that we've built up. No different than the Israelites. The wilderness is a hard place. But His purpose in humbling, His purpose in leading us through the hardness of that is twofold. Look what He says. That you might understand, verse 3, that man does not live by bread alone but everything that precedes out of the mouth of the Lord. I am humbling you that you might understand the visual reality. And your stomachs may tell you, "You need bread and water to live daily." That bread and water are not what give you life, but literally what gives you life is every last thing that comes out of My mouth, thus sayeth the Lord. Where you are dependent, not on your own strength, not on your own effort, not on the resources you see, but you are dependent completely and totally upon the word of the Lord. Church family, could it be as we move into this new year, could there be a challenge in front of us to eat and feast from the word of God as if our lives depended on it because He says they do. My newborn daughter eats like her life depends upon it. It's quite comical. Given us a lot of laughs and a lot of not sleep. But as much as my newborn daughter needs milk to live, even more so she needs the word of God to survive. And church family, when we say the word of God can we be clear? I'm not anti

any of the things I'm about to mention, but they need to be in their proper place. He doesn't say man lives by their favorite podcast, or their favorite Christian author, or their favorite Bible study by their favorite Christian author, but by the word of God itself. Are you, are we, in the word feasting in complete dependence? This is what he teaches us in the wilderness. Not only this, not only are we to depend upon the word, but he says that you might keep the commands of the Lord to walk in His ways and to fear Him. What we learn in the wilderness is not to depend upon ourselves, but to depend upon the word of God. That we would walk. Walk is a sign of maturity. It's a sign of consistency. God is not concerned that we sprint occasionally His commands. He's not looking for us to daily take lengthy runs at His commands. He is looking for us to walk in the fear of Him. And in the wilderness, we learn fact from fiction. We learn what is real and what is not. We learn what is idolatrous and what is not. And in the wilderness, in the humbling of God, we learn how to walk in the fear of Him as we rest upon His word. Remember this. Remember His purpose. Not just remember His purpose, but remember His heart. Look with me in verse 5. Thus you are to know in your heart, in the core of your being, in the center of who you are, you are to know, you are to know that the Lord your God, this time in the wilderness was His disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. Now we don't have time to flip over to Proverbs 3 or Hebrew 12. Let me just tell you what Scriptures say about a father disciplining his son. A father disciplines the son whom he loves. We see we need to remember God's heart. God's heart in the wilderness is not to say, "Hmm, I'm going to have fun making you go through hardship. Hmm, I'm going to have fun exposing every little thing in your life." God's heart when He looks down and leads us sovereignly into the wilderness, to humble us and to test us is a heart of love that knows what is good for us. That sees the depths of darkness in our hearts and that will work out every last drop of self-reliance that would steal from us the joy and intimacy of being and experiencing the fullness of being His child. He says, you are to know. There is a love here. This is why we find that those whom God loves greatly, He crushes greatly. You see this pattern all throughout Scripture. That those whom God loves He leads and He takes into the wilderness. Ultimately for our good. Flip a couple verses ahead. If you look in verse 16.

[¹⁶In the wilderness God fed you manna which your fathers did not know that He might humble you that He might test you to do good for you in the end.](#)

We must remember that God is sovereign over the wilderness, that He has a purpose for the wilderness. And that the wilderness shows us His heart. So that when you and I come to the wilderness, because church family, it's no mistake for most, 2020 has felt like a wilderness. And maybe there are expectations. In fact, there are at the beginning of a year. Maybe they're heightened because of how 2020 was that 2021 will be new and fresh. Or maybe those expectations are dampened because some of the wildernesses of 2020 do not respect the calendar. But, church family, if you are walking in a wilderness that God has led you to, then you remember He is sovereign over that wilderness. You remember that His purpose is to humble you and I. To test you and I that we might depend upon His word alone. It is a purpose and a leading that comes out of His heart of love. So what you and I can do is we can stop our grumbling, our complaining, our anxious looking around, and we can trust Him with confidence. We can trust Him with confidence. We can make a choice to act and relate to Him on the basis of what is true and not just what we feel. But we can also find the freedom with God in the wilderness to express to Him what we feel. Go read the Psalms. Psalms of lament. Where did David write those Psalms of lament as he wrestled. God where are You? What are You doing?

He wrote them in the wilderness out of faith in a God whom was sovereign, carrying out His purpose, loved him. If we're feasting on the word, it will be easier to rest with confidence in the character of Christ. Church family, you and I must not forget what God is up to in our lives. He has not promised you and I health, wealth, and prosperity this side of heaven. What He has promised us is that He will take all things and work them together for His good in our life. And then He says that that good is to conform, to take you and I, sinners by birth, in need of a reconciliation with God that is given by His grace and received through repentance and faith. And He takes us, restores us to Himself, and He says, to conform us to the image of Christ. He finishes what He starts. God does not fail. His plans are for good and not for harm. He does not call us to walk through hardship or He does call us to walk through hardship but His intention is not to leave us in the wilderness. With God, the wilderness is not a final dwelling place; it is a place you journey through. That's what He says to Israel. Look what He says in verse 7.

⁷For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains of springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; ⁸a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees, and pomegranates, and it's a land of olive oil and honey; ⁹a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron and whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰And when you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

Church family, we are told that in the new covenant all of the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. We are told that Jesus has given us all things for life and godliness. We are told that He has gone to prepare a permanent home for us where one day we will be given a resurrection body and we will dwell for eternity seeing Him face to face. His purpose is not to leave us in the wilderness; it is to bring us through the wilderness that we might receive and dwell in the fullness of what He has given us in salvation and bless His name. So we can trust Him with confidence and we can submit to His purpose in the wilderness with hope. The wilderness is not a place where we go and bargain with God and try to get out. God is, God has the right to lead us there. God is the one who determines the length of our stay. God is the one who sees what purposes He will work out so our place in the wilderness is to submit to Him. But we can do so not with fear or intimidation but with hope. Did you notice the little verse in here? Verse 5; verse 4, sorry. It says:

⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.

Have you thought about that? For forty years they never had to buy a new pair of clothes, or more adequately, make a new pair of clothes. For forty years their feet never got tired. That's supernatural. That's the supernatural grace of God. Why? Because when God leads you and I to the wilderness, it may be small things that are easily overlooked, but His grace enables us to walk through it. So, church family, when you find yourself in the wilderness, when you find yourself in days that seem idle and useless spiritually, when you find yourself in places where prayer and holy service seem like a burden, when you find yourself in those places, may I encourage you and I to look around, to look around in the wilderness and see Abraham waiting 25 years. To look around in that wilderness to see Joseph in the wilderness of that prison cell at no sin of his own. To look around in that wilderness to see Moses, forty years God preparing him to lead his people. To look around in that wilderness to see David hiding for his life even

though he's been anointed and promised the king. To look around in that wilderness to see Jeremiah weeping when no one responds to his divine message. To look around in that wilderness to see Daniel faithfully praying though threatened with the lion's den. To look around in that wilderness to see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego dancing in the fire of the furnace. To look around in that wilderness and to see Esther on her knees fasting to go before the king. So look around in that wilderness and to see the apostle Paul in a prison cell beaten and shackled writing the Lord and encouraging the believers. To look around in that wilderness and to hear John the Baptist cry, "Make way the path for the Lord. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And to look around in that wilderness and to see Jesus rebuking the enemy with His word. To look around in that wilderness to see Jesus on His knees alone in a garden in agony praying with drops of blood. To look around in that wilderness on the side of a road to see Him hanging there on the cross battered and broken, bruised. To look around in that wilderness and in the silence of a garden in a moment that was between He and the Father. To see Him walk out of the tomb. You and I can submit to God with hope in the wilderness because this is the God who is sovereign over the wilderness. This is His path. This is how He humbles and breaks and leads and loves His children. We can with hope in the wilderness because He has a purpose. We can submit with hope in the wilderness because He loves us. We can submit with hope in the wilderness because He is taking us to the promised land.

Now just spent three quarters of the sermon focusing on what is given the most attention in the passage but isn't maybe actually the main point. And here's why. We need to understand and remember the wilderness. Because look what He says in verse 11. Here's the one command in the whole passage.

¹¹Beware, be on your guard, pay attention that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep His commands, His ordinances, and His statutes today which I am commanding you; ¹²otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, when you have built good homes and lived in them, ¹³when your herds and your flocks multiply, your silver and gold multiplies, when all that you have multiplies, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ¹⁵He is the one who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions, and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you. ¹⁶In the wilderness He fed you manna that He might humble and test you and do good for you in the end. ¹⁷Otherwise, you may say in your heart if you don't remember this, 'My power and the strength of my hand has made me this wealth.'

You see, church family, God is going, when you are brought into salvation in God, there are blessing of God that come with that. That God intends for you and I to dwell in. But here is the reality. If we do not remember the wilderness, we will forget the Lord and His blessings. And notice, forgetting the Lord is not waking up one day and going, "I don't really remember who Jesus is." That's not what forgetting the Lord is. Forgetting the Lord is failing to live out His word. It has been said, the seat of the church is the blood of the martyrs. The idea being that when the church faces persecution, it grows in a way that is, that is beyond comprehension. Because of that it has been suggested that the greatest damage to the church is when we face prosperity because we don't seem to retain the same humility and dependence upon the word and

on His purposes. How do you fix that problem? Church family, by remembering the wilderness. By remembering the wilderness. Because if we don't, we will take good things of God, blessings of God, and we will turn them to ourselves. We will take things that God has given and we will, we will disregard the commands of God. Simple ways, church family, sports if wonderful. But sports at the neglect of faithfulness to the body is not. Careers are wonderful; but careers to the neglect of the spiritual discipleship of your family is not. Entertainment, there's nothing inherently wrong with that; but giving in and watching entertainment that does not honor God's heart and His word is not. The trends and opinions of others over the opinions of Christ and His word are not. We can disregard and forget God all too easily because in the land of plenty we are prone to forget that man does not live by bread alone, but every word that comes out of the mouth of God.

You and I stand against that reality by remembering, an act of deliberate will of thought, who God is and what He teaches us in the wilderness. It's in that walking in that humility and dependence that we thank Him for His blessings. That we can enjoy Him as He intends and we can faithfully use them for His glory rather than turning them as an idol of the culture to bow down to. Church family, there's no way around it. God is going to take you and I through the wilderness. We can long for better days ahead. We can long for easier days ahead. But if we do not walk through the breaking and discipline of the wilderness, we may get to those days only to find ourselves deceived by our pride and bowing in idolatry. It's time we cease complaining and daydreaming to get out of the wilderness and we submit to God in the wilderness. That we remember the wilderness that we walk the pathway He has led us to. Church family, as we move into 2021, whether or not God's pathway for you takes you into luscious valleys or whether or not God's pathway for you is a continuation in the wilderness; my prayer is that you'll remember the God of the wilderness who is sovereign over the wilderness whose purpose is to humble us in the wilderness out of His heart of love for us in the wilderness. So may we be on our guard to remember so that His purposes would be worked out in our lives.

Pray with me.

Father, You make no bones about it, God. You are a God who leads Your people through the wilderness. Sometimes it's corporate, sometimes it's individual, sometimes it's in a specific area, sometimes it's all of our life. But You lead us through the wilderness out of love for Your good in our lives. So may we be a people who submit if we find ourselves there. And God if today we find ourselves in a season of plenty, a season where it seems that Your blessings are overflowing in our life, then may we be careful and diligent to remember who You are and what You teach us in the wilderness. Father so that we would not bow to idols or trends but we would stand with arms raised and declare Your glory to a broken and battered world. Holy Spirit as You move in this room may we be faithful to respond. It's in Your name that I pray. Amen.