

“The Wilderness to the Promised Land” – Pr Jim Sprengle

Lent Midweek 5 – April 6, 2022

- I. **Joshua 3:1-6** –
- II. **Ever get sidetracked while going on a trip?**
 - a. I suppose it's one thing to travel across the wilderness in order to get to your destination; but it's a totally different thing to wander around a wasteland for forty years.
 - b. The Israelites did both...
 - i. Of course, as they left Egypt and made their way to Mount Sinai, the plan was to continue on to the Promised Land of Canaan.
 - ii. And they did, but when they sent twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan to see what their new homeland would be like—and what would be required to occupy it—things changed pretty quickly.
 1. The spies came back with good news about the land itself, but they were terrified of the people already living there.
 2. Yes, Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey, as God promised, but the people living there were giants and the Israelites looked like grasshoppers compared to them.
 3. The spies were afraid... and this fear worked its way throughout the whole community of Israel.
 - iii. God's people were afraid.
 1. And in their fear, they refused to go forward.
 - c. It was because of this act of unfaithfulness... the people's lack of trust in the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt... that the Israelites became wanderers in the wilderness for forty years.
 - i. None of the people who were twenty years old and older would ever get to experience the land of Canaan.
 - ii. Only Caleb and Joshua got to go because they were the spies who trusted in the Lord's ability deliver the Promised Land.
 - iii. All the rest would die in the wilderness—only their children would enter Canaan.
 - d. It is one thing to travel across the wilderness to arrive at a destination and quite another to wander around the wasteland for forty years.
 - i. The wilderness between Egypt and Canaan was a land of suffering and death—a land where they were sentenced to suffer because of their sin, and ultimately die on the journey.
 - ii. To make it even worse, they had seen the Promised Land on the horizon, they were right there.... But they didn't trust God.
- III. **Sin exiles us from God.**
 - a. Sin causes us to trust in ourselves.
 - b. Sin sends us into a wilderness of suffering and death.

- c. Sin keeps us from the destination.
 - i. It's not like we can get out of it... as much as we've tried.
 - ii. The Israelites tried to go into Canaan without trusting God, but ended up wandering in the wilderness... facing the stark reality of suffering and death.
- d. The Israelites are a lot more like us than we want to admit, because we also tend to turn away from trusting in God to deliver us.
- e. As we rely on ourselves, sin is blocking our entrance to the Promised Land.

IV. **The Promised Land...**

- a. ...where the Lord provides... a place where the Hebrews would live in houses they did not build and eat from vineyards and orchards they did not plant.
 - i. The land of Canaan is a land flowing with milk and honey, lacking nothing.
 - 1. It is a land of plenty and perfection—the Promised Land.
 - ii. This land is not only where the Lord provides abundantly, but also a place where the Lord will dwell with His people.
- b. But here's the thing... this Promised Land of God's provision and presence for Israel points us to another promised land.
 - i. Canaan reminds us of another place of God's provision and presence — heaven.
 - 1. Without a doubt, we will lack nothing in the heavenly courts.
 - 2. It's the dwelling place of the Lord... and His people... because they live in the place Jesus prepared for them.
- c. But before heaven, there is sin.
 - i. There is the wilderness.
 - ii. How do we get out of the land of suffering and death and finally arrive in the land of life and joy?

V. **The journey out of the wilderness must go through the waters.**

- a. For the people of Israel, the way was through the Jordan River...
 - i. It wasn't by themselves... it wasn't that they did the right things and made themselves right by God first...
 - ii. In fact, they couldn't even plan anything because they were wandering around in circles!
 - iii. No, they needed God to lead the way...
 - 1. The ark of the covenant, the dwelling place of the Lord with His people, leads the way.
 - 2. And when the feet of those carrying this holy ark touch the waters of the Jordan, the waters part, and the path is dry and wide open for the people.
 - iv. The Lord prepares the way, the Lord leads the way; the presence of the Lord goes before Joshua and the people.

VI. **And... The exile is over.**

- a. They have journeyed from the wilderness into the Land of Promise.
 - i. They have returned.
- b. Our Savior, Jesus Christ went ahead of us, just like God did for Israel.
 - i. Jesus goes down into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist.
 - ii. The Sinless One from God needs no cleansing.... but we do.
 - iii. By His Baptism, our sins are given to Him.
 - iv. And in an act of complete reversal, Jesus takes our sins, not into the Promised Land, but rather back out into the wilderness.
 - v. He goes through the waters into the wilderness, carrying our sins back to Satan.
- c. And because Christ carries our sins, we no longer do!
 - i. The wilderness of sin, the place of suffering and death, is no longer our dwelling place.
 1. The path has been cleared of obstacles, and now the destination lies ahead.
 2. The way to the promised land is open before us... but it is still through the waters.
 3. Now, those waters have been cleansed and purified so that our Baptism by these waters will grant forgiveness, life, and salvation.
 4. These waters make us the children of God—those who have been renewed and restored to His presence.
 5. We have passed through the wilderness and through the waters, into the promised land of everlasting life!
- d. The journey from the wilderness to the promised land of heaven is not one we go on alone, not one we plan out, not one we work out, not one we carry out—it is the journey Christ first made to prepare the way.
 - i. He has gone through the waters to prepare them for our Baptism into the Kingdom, and He has now gone ahead of us to prepare a place that we have not built with our own hands... and a great feast that we have not prepared.
 - ii. He has gone to the right hand of the Father to prepare a place for us, that we might go to be with Him.
 - iii. That where He is, we may be also. In Jesus' name. Amen.¹

¹ based on the sermon series, "Return from Exile: A Lenten Journey," Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2017.