

Deuteronomy 11:10-12 (Walter Thomas Turpin) 52912

Christian Truth: Volume 17, Wilderness — the Land, The (11:10-12)

Deut. 8:1-9; 11:10-12; 26:1-11

You will find two very different experiences recorded in chapters 8 and 11 of this Book. Chapter 8 sets before us the wilderness and its lessons. If I think of it as the place where every Christian is, though it is true also he belongs to heaven (seated in heavenly places in Christ), yet looking at the wilderness as the scene through which we are passing, the object and purport of it are clearly discernible.

In heaven there will be no broken hearts, no trials, no hunger, no thirst; but here the blessed God finds a place to display His heart as equal to it all—that the difficulties, the trials and sorrows, through which His people pass, do but afford Him the occasion for showing how He can care for His own. The blessed God charged Himself with the clothes and feet of His people those forty years! How wonderful! It is the greatness of His love that enables Him to enter into it all—nothing too great and nothing too small for His care and interest. We on our side need the wilderness; it is a place in which dependence and subjection are put to the test. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, to prove thee, and know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years."

Now this is the wilderness; it is connected with God's ways with His people. And as I have observed, it is here we learn dependence and subjection. It was all a sandy waste before them and behind them, and just the place for them to learn how to lean on Him—"That He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD."

It is wonderful, surely, how little we are cast on God; no matter how varied our circumstances are, there is one common point to be found in all our histories alike; namely, independence. It was independence in Adam in paradise, when he thought he could do better than. God had done for him.

There is not one solitary thing in this world that ministers to you as a child of God, as a new creature in Christ Jesus. You are to count on God, and none but God. The Lord Jesus Christ, as a man, was perfect in dependence and obedience. The first man in the garden of Eden, surrounded by all the tokens and marks of God's care, displayed his perfect independence; the second Man, in the wilderness, without any subsidy, is perfect in dependence. He recommended, morally, the history of the nation. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My Son out of Egypt." Hos. 11:1; see also Matt. 2:15. They were in the wilderness; He was in the wilderness; they broke down and failed everywhere—He was perfect in it all. Christ recovered everything for God, and 'secured every blessing for His own. Have we learned what it is, day by day and moment by moment, to live by every word of God? There is nothing but restlessness and unreality in all around us—no quiet, no repose.

What a path that of dependence is! What would straits and difficulties be to a man that walked in that road? What were they to Caleb and Joshua? They were bread for them, and they could not be less than bread for us. What a wonderful display!—the blessed God showing me He is above difficulties, and faith feeding upon them! The second lesson of the wilderness is subjection; how few of us know what it is! I do not mean resignation; resignation means that you endure it because you cannot help it—subjection, that you fall in with the will of God as the delight of your heart.

The wilderness is the scene where the will may be constantly crossed; and that is just the place to elicit the subjection of your heart. See its perfection in the second Man (Matt. 11); "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." And this, observe, was in a moment when all had failed to meet His longing, loving heart. John doubted His being the Messiah; Israel refused Him; and the cities which had witnessed His mightiest works repented not. What a wonderful thing for the heart to find its rest in the fact that God has had His way! It is not that I cannot help it, but my joy and satisfaction when the will of God triumphs at my cost. If not so, when our desires are interrupted, our pathway broken in upon (it may be in good things, that were only the energy of the natural will), how disappointed with ourselves (and shall I say it?) how almost disappointed with God; heartbroken oneself; and with the dreadful sensation of being disappointed with God! Oh, to be glad that God would have His own way, even if it breaks in upon cherished hopes and prospects; but nothing will impart this to us save implicit obedience and subjection, and a faith that will trust Him in the dark.

"As for God, His way is perfect." Psalm 18:30. "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." Psalm 77:19. Not a single affection of His heart is kept back or unexpressed; read them in the light of the sorrows of the heart of Jesus, and you will find how it will cheer you passing through the valley of the shadow of death. "Thou leadest Thy people like a flock." Psalm 77:20. Who is it that leads His sheep, keeps them in His hand, and watches over them day by day? There is but One, and His name is one.

The Lord give us to draw the reason of His ways with us from the knowledge of His heart; then His will shall be our delight.

The end of chapter 8 describes the land as it is in itself; it is a region of plenty and satisfied desire. "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass."

But in chapter 11 the land is described in its contrast. In Egypt there is trouble connected with the best of things; they had trouble to procure the fertilizing streams of the Nile; Canaan, on the contrary, drank water of the rain of heaven, and the eyes of God were always on it, from the beginning to the end of the year.

The very best thing you possess in this world has trouble connected with it; who can tell when we may lose it? The sweeping desolations of death may come in upon it, and "increased happiness does but widen the target at which death shoots his arrows." I may die to them or they may die to me; here we are in the presence of death; there we shall be in the presence of Christ.

The only place that can command or detain the eye of God now, is the spot where that blessed One is, and there I go to remember my sorrow no more; by faith I am now introduced into it, and share His joy. I love to think He cares for me in the wilderness; still I love to think He says, You shall know another place the exact contrast to it. Now what is to engage us in this place of rest and satisfaction? This we have in chapter 26. "When thou art come in... and possessest it, and dwellest therein." Every Christian has come in, but then it is another thing to take practical possession, or make it our own; and to dwell, is to make it our home. Are you rather a visitor to earth upon His business, and a dweller in that home? A stranger here-at home there? In Christendom the effort is to be what they are not. No one can work themselves up to be heavenly. I am to walk here in the sense of what I am in Christ. Do you dwell there? Have you possessed it? Can you say, Thank God, He has brought me in, given me possession, and I now dwell there; and the spot I possess is the very place where the beloved One of God is crowned?

Thus we have looked at the wilderness and the land, the objects and purports of each. May our hearts largely profit by the lessons of both, while we have deeper and larger apprehensions by the Holy Ghost of our present place on high in Christ before God, as well as one with Him in glory, for His name's sake. Amen.

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