Whispers – Part 2

# In the Wilderness

# (1 Kings 19:1-13)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. It’s wonderful to have you with us this weekend as we continue in part two of our message series called “Whispers”. We’re talking about experiencing the presence of God in a practical sense in difficult seasons of our lives, and remembering the promise of Christmas recorded in Matthew’s gospel,

"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

And this is so important, because not only did the Word become flesh, but he is God with us. This is an important truth because at this time of year so many people are hurting, lonely, and struggling in a season of wilderness. And so, this morning I want to share with you about experiencing God’s presence in the wilderness, but first let me describe what I mean by the wilderness.

The wilderness is an uncultivated place; a desolate place that’s often unoccupied and spiritually barren, and so the wilderness can be a place of aimless wandering. You know, last week we looked at “Whispers – In the Valley,” but a season of wilderness will often last longer because you’re passing through the valley, but your wilderness wandering can be aimless, pointless, with no end in sight. In fact, there may be some of you here who may be in some sort of wilderness right now where your feeling disoriented, maybe a little lost, and it’s like nobody really understands what you’re going through.

For some of you, your wilderness might be a job, you know, you might feel like you’re stuck, there’s no possibility of advancement, and you’re wondering if you should go back to school, hold on, or do something different.

And for some of you, it may be a relationship that seems to be going nowhere, you’ve invested all this time, but you just can’t seem to get a commitment.

Others of you, maybe you’ve been renting, you know you haven’t been getting any equity, and so you’re wondering if maybe you should buy a house, but rent is so high you feel like you’re stuck in that place. Month after month goes by, you’re doing the time, but you’ve got nothing to show for it.

Still others of you, things were going great, but then you discovered things weren’t exactly as they seemed. There was a breach in trust, maybe a lie or unfaithfulness, and suddenly you find yourself in the wilderness. You’re trying to understand, to rationalize your feelings, but whatever you do just doesn’t seem to help the pain and you feel alone, parched, and spiritually dry.

In fact, a similar thing happened to Jesus when he was baptized. You know, the Bible says that Jesus had this incredible experience with God the Father, Matthew tells us, that when Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said,

"This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy" (Matthew 3:17, NLT).

And so, life was good, Jesus was having this mountaintop experience where his Father is publicly expressing his love and approval for him. But immediately following that moment of intimacy, that “attaboy” moment with God the Father, the next verse says that,

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil” (Matthew 4:1, NLT).

And so, maybe like Jesus, you’re wandering in the wilderness of life, but here’s what I hope you’ll understand this morning. When you find yourself in the wilderness, no matter how lonely you feel or how much it hurts, the wilderness can be a great gift if it drives you to experience the presence of God like never before. In fact, the Bible tells us that after Jesus wilderness experience,

“Angels came and attended him” (Matthew 4:11).

This morning, I want to illustrate this for you, digging deeper, as we look at the life of Elijah. Now, I find great encouragement in Elijah, because the Bible tells us in James chapter 5, “Elijah was as human as we are” (vs. 17, NLT) and in these chapters we see him at his highest and his lowest. Elijah was a prophet, a mighty man of God, and we’re going to look at a season of his life where he had just seen God move in an amazing way, maybe the most powerful supernatural spiritual victory of his life, crushing the spiritual forces of darkness in a showdown with 450 demonic prophets of Baal.

We’re going to be looking at first Kings, where God had showed up in a demonstration of power, consuming the sacrifice on the altar with fire from heaven, when suddenly in chapter 19, Elijah finds himself at a very low point in his life. This great man of God goes almost immediately from the exhilaration of this great victory for God into the wilderness, from success to despondency, and we find him exhausted, depressed, and all alone. But God is with him, he’s going to get him back on track, and so God is going to minister to him in the wilderness. Let’s pick up the story in verse one of 1 Kings chapter 19, where the Bible tells us,

“Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword” (1 Kings 19:1).

Before we go any farther, let me give you a little bit of context so that you know who we’re talking about. Ahab was an evil King whom the Bible says had done more evil in the eyes of God than any other king before him. However, King Ahab had an even more evil wife named Jezebel, who after hearing about all that Elijah had done, took things into her own hands. Verse two tells us that she sent a messenger to Elijah to say,

“May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." And the Bible tells us, “Elijah was afraid and ran for his life…” (1 Kings 19:2-3).

So, Elijah had this great victory, and yet suddenly he’s afraid, he’s running for his life, and when I say that he’s running, that’s a bit of an understatement; because this is the prophet Elijah, the great man of God, and even though he’s on foot verse three tells us,

“When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert..." (1 Kings 19:3-4).

And so, Elijah runs for his life, he runs to Beersheba, which is a distance of about 100 miles, and not only that but he’s dragging his servant along with him. Now, he leaves his servant in Beersheba, while he himself went another day’s journey further. Verse four says,

“He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep" (1 Kings 19:4-5).

Elijah had just been on the mountaintop, he’d experienced this great victory, but suddenly finds himself in the wilderness where he’s exhausted, burnt out, alone, afraid, and desperate. And it’s there in the wilderness that he said the words that so many of us have said or at least felt at some point or another in our lives. You know, when you’re raising kids and you’ve had it up to here. There’s a situation at work and you just can’t take the pressure another day. You go out to the car to come home and you’ve got a flat tire. You get home and your toilet overflows, you’re spent, you’ve had enough, and you can’t take anymore. And so, number one, you’ve had enough.

## 1. When You’ve Had Enough

Elijah said, “I have had enough, Lord.” And I’m sure that many of you’ve said those exact words. In fact, today you might be in the same place, where you’re just tired, you’re overwhelmed, and you need a fresh encounter with the very real presence of God? You know, some rest, a little relaxation would be good, but even more than that, what you need is an encounter with the presence of God. Because you’re more than physically exhausted, you’re spiritually depleted, and so you need to be spiritually replenished. That’s what David acknowledged in Psalm 23, he said,

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul” (Psalms 23:1-3).

And so, what does God do for Elijah? He restores him. Verse five says,

“All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ Elijah looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again” (1 Kings 19:5-6).

Now, in our culture today, there are so many fads in regard to diet, exercise, and relaxation, but the reality is that rest and proper nutrition is something that we often ignore because we’ve got so much to do. Here in this passage, we see the Lord ministering to the prophet, and recognize that sometimes the most spiritual thing that we can do is simply to rest in the presence of God and let God refresh us. The Angel of the Lord provides food and water for Elijah and he lay down again. Verse seven says,

“The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you” (1 Kings 19:7).

I love the fact that God came back a second time, because so many times I don’t get it the first time. You know, we have a God who continues to pursue us, he comes back a second time, a third time, and there are those of you for whom God is coming back again. You see, if you don’t get it the first time, he’ll come back again, and so God comes back to Elijah again saying, “Eat so that you have strength to go to the place where I am.” Verse eight continues, saying that Elijah,

“Got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God” (1 Kings 19:8).

Elijah now strengthened by the food and rest, traveled until he reached the mountain of God, the place where he would experience God.

“There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:9).

Now, obviously God knew what Elijah was doing there, just like he called out to Adam in the garden, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Or knew where Jonah was when he provided that great fish to rescue Jonah after he was thrown overboard (Jonah 1:17). And so, here’s Elijah hiding in a cave, 100 miles from his place of ministry, and the question, "What are you doing here Elijah?" wasn’t for information. It wasn’t because God’s in heaven wondering what on earth is going on down there. But he wanted Elijah to consider and begin to identify the lies that he was believing so he could speak truth into his life and so that he could restore him as he’s wandering in this season of wilderness.

## 2. When You’re Wandering

And so, number two, we’re going to talk about when you’re wandering in the wilderness. You see, it’s so subtle, and Elijah was just as human as we are, and so if we’re not pressing in and seeking to be led by the Spirit, by default we allow ourselves to slip back into our old ways, back into our old nature, and we can quickly find ourselves being like those whom the Bible says have, “Exchanged the truth of God for a lie...” (Romans 1:25). And yet, we know that “God wants all people to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). And so, God whispers, he speaks into our lives, wanting to replace the lies that we’re believing with his truth, so that he can restore us.

Some of you today, God may be whispering and saying the same thing to you. “Why are you running away? What are you doing here?” And so, Elijah starts whining just like we often do when we feel like God isn’t answering our prayers, when he’s not doing what we want him to do, and so he replied,

"I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:10).

And so, Elijah had come to believe that no one cared like he did, that he was the only one, and that everyone was dependent upon him. And so, he’s having a pity party, he’s in a spiritual wilderness, because he feels like he’s been working so hard, he’s the only one left, and now they’re trying to kill him too. But he was actually claiming more responsibility than was his and so God tells him, “There are actually 7000 (1 Kings 19:18), 7000 others who are still seeking me, who are still praying, and who haven’t bowed down to false gods. So, don’t believe the enemy’s lies, Elijah, you’re not the only one.”

And in the same way, many of us have come to believe, “I’m never going to have a good relationship, I’m always going to feel alone, I’m always going to be depressed, it’s always going to be this way” and God would actually say, “That’s not exactly true, there are 7000 – there are people who care about you, there’s the Holy Spirit to comfort you, there’s the church to support you, and so don’t believe that lie.” You see, Elijah was hurting so bad, his need had become so great, that he wasn’t able to see beyond himself and therefore he felt all alone. But God comes again and again and reaches out to him in his deepest need. God loves on him, ministering to him in the wilderness of his vulnerability, and brings healing in the middle of his pain. You see, it’s when you’re deep in the wilderness that it can actually become a gift because it drives you to depend on God. I love how God responds in verse 11, he says to Elijah,

"Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord wasn’t in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord wasn’t in the earthquake.”

Verse 12 continues, “After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord wasn’t in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:11-12).

And so, Elijah’s standing there, he’s looking out of the cave, he’s expecting something big, you know, something supernatural, like fire falling from heaven. And he’s looking in the wind, he’s looking in the earthquake, he’s looking in the fire; when at last there’s this still small voice, as gentle as a whisper. He’s expecting God to reveal himself in some remarkable way, but number three, when he encounters the presence of God, when he recognizes the voice of God, it’s just a whisper.

## 3. The Presence of God

Elijah was looking for something remarkable, something spectacular, but when he encounters God it was as a gentle whisper. And in this day of mega-churches, big conferences, and loud music, it’s difficult to understand that God doesn’t need to move in a big, loud, or dramatic way. But we need to recognize, we need to understand that God doesn’t need to speak loudly because he’s right here. He so close to you. You see, God whispers because he’s so near he doesn’t want to startle you. He whispers because he’s close and he’s said that over and over and over again.

He told Jacob, “Don’t be afraid, for I am with you” (Genesis 26:24). Jacob was amazed and said,

“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17).

God’s here! To Joshua, God said, “I am with you just as I was with Moses” Joshua 3:7). To Isaiah he said, “I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10). To Jeremiah he said, “I am with you” (Jeremiah 1:8). To the nation of Israel, he said, “I am with you” (Jeremiah 46:28). To the people of God, he said, “I am with you” (Haggai 1:13). To the disciples he said, “I’m with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). To the apostle Paul he said, “Don’t be afraid; keep on speaking, don’t be silent” Why? “For I am with you” (Acts 18:9-10). You see, God doesn’t have to shout to get your attention, he just whispers to draw you close. And he’s the same yesterday, today, and forever. “The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you..." (Deuteronomy 31:8).

He lives with you and will be in you. And so, he’s with you in the valley, in the wilderness, in the storm, and when you hurt, he hurts with you. He whispers because he’s right there with you, he’s at your side, he’s right here. And verse 13 says, when Elijah heard that gentle whisper… when he heard it…

“He pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave” (1 Kings 19:13).

Recognizing the voice of God, realizing that he was encountering God, that he was meeting God, he pulled his cloak over part of his face, signifying his respect just as Moses hid his face because he dared not look upon God (Exodus 3:6). And Elijah walked out to the mouth of the cave and stood there in the presence of God. The Lord ministered to him, restoring him, strengthening him, and healing his hurts.

This morning I want you to know that if you’re in that wilderness place, if your heart is hurting, and you feel brokenhearted the Bible tells us,

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed” (Psalms 34:18, NLT).

He’s close. God whispers because he’s close. He said, “My sheep listen to my voice…they know my voice” (John 10:3-4) and he’s always with you, he’s always close. But it’s in that season, that experience of wilderness, that we come to know and understand God, being dependent upon him, so that we have to have his presence moment by moment. Now, we’d never want anybody else to have to experience that season of wilderness, we’d never want to go through it again ourselves, but it’s as we’re wandering in the wilderness, feeling like nobody understands, that God is so close, God understands and he cares. David said it this way,

“Your right hand will hold me fast” (Psalms 139:10).

And so, here’s what I hope you’ll understand. We get to know God deeply, intimately, in the wilderness. Elijah saw the mighty power of God, but he ended up running for his life, fleeing into the wilderness, and needing God’s presence like never before. He looked for God in the great and powerful wind, but God wasn’t in the wind. The ground shook, but God wasn’t in the earthquake. Then came a fire, and he thought most certainly like the burning bush wasn’t consumed in the presence of Moses, the presence of God was there, but God wasn’t in the fire. After the fire came a gentle whisper and God was in the whisper. His voice was so quiet and so gentle because he’s that close.

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December 02, 2018

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*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.*

*Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*