

Touchstones of The Lamb in the Wilderness

Part Two: The Touchstones Appear in the Wilderness

Introduction

In Part One we described the wilderness as a place of being humbled in our own eyes while discovering our complete deficiency in the midst of temptation and trial. Yet it is in the wasteland of our own resources that God has purposed for us also to discover His provision. In the Old Testament, Christ and Him Crucified is lifted up in type and shadow before the eyes of the people in the very places that their own depravity was manifesting the greatest. This shows God's intent was not and is not to condemn us but to give us Life through His Son. To understand God's purpose in the wilderness and receive the provision of Christ Crucified will bring us into Land of Promise where Christ flows forth as our very Life.

The Ashes of the Red Heifer

"Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way"
(Hebrews 5:2a).

"And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer"
(Numbers 19:17a).

Our first touchstone is the ashes of the red heifer and the scriptural account is found in Numbers chapter 19. In these scriptures we read that people who were defiled by touching death were cut off from the congregation of Israel. Their only hope of being brought back into fellowship was for a clean person to administer the ashes of the red heifer in a very specific way for seven days. If the ashes were applied properly, then at the end of the seventh day the defiled person was purified and clean.

This touchstone shows the depth of Christ's sacrifice and the power of His Cross in a profound way. Because ashes reveal the complete consumption of Christ as our sacrifice, they also show how far reaching His death has gone. There were ashes in the wilderness for the soul that was cut off from the people and defiled by death. Those who had cut themselves off from life by defiling themselves still could find Life through the Cross of Christ. Provision was made to the uttermost. The Lamb has provided a way of escape to the farthest reaches of our lack.

The only thing holding us back from entering into His fullness is unbelief. God's

compassion is extended forth to those who have gone outside of the way (Hebrews 5:2). His arm is not shortened but has reached out to those in the furthest corners “outside of the camp”. Those who have been rejected, defiled, and cursed from the congregation still have provision in the depths of Calvary’s flood. They, too, can enter in so that no member of the body is left cut off and forgotten. Rather than becoming hardened through the desperation of our own condition and the judgment of others, may we turn our eyes and hearts to lay hold of the free gift of Life that God will impart to us through embracing the work of His Cross.

Water From A Rock

“He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river”

(Psalms 78:15-16, 20; Psalms 105:41).

“Surely He hath borne out griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him: and with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Our second touchstone is in Numbers chapter 20. It is the account of water coming from a rock. In their typical fashion, the children of Israel are ganging up on Moses and Aaron and accusing God and His leaders of destroying their lives in this horrible wilderness. This was their way of saying that they were thirsty and would like some water.

Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the Lord. God instructed Moses to speak to the rock before their eyes and it would give forth its water (Numbers 20:1-11).

Moses took his rod and smote the rock twice because he was upset with the people. Water gushed forth abundantly from the rock and the congregation could drink. The strike the people earned landed on the rock. Even though Moses did this act in anger and disobedience to God’s command, it does show us a picture of the Cross. Rather than punishing the people for striving with God, the death blow landed on the rock so that what was in it could flow out to the people. In this same way, the punishment that we have earned has landed on the Son of God. He was stricken and smitten of God as He bore our grief and carried our sorrow. His wounds and bruises came because of our rebellion and sin. We could have never accessed the living waters needed to survive if Christ was not crucified for us. It is only through His

death that we can partake of His Life. Once again, the Lamb brings His Life to people who are perishing in the wilderness of their old nature. He is the way of escape.

A Serpent On A Pole

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”(John 3:14-16).

Our third touchstone is the serpent on a pole found in Numbers 21. The people had been speaking against God and Moses, complaining about the food and water, and accusing God of leading them out into the wilderness to die. God then sent fiery serpents among the people, and many were bitten and many died. As we have spoken of before, this may have looked like punishment, but in actuality it was only the physical manifestation of what they already were on the inside. These people were eaten up with the poison of listening to lies against their leadership. They were perishing spiritually for they were being sustained by evil thoughts rather than the Bread of Life. They had been bit and the Serpent’s venom was bringing death into their system. They may have never comprehended the seriousness of their condition if the Lord had not graciously allowed the outward serpents to manifest before their eyes the true spiritual state they had come into. He was not punishing them but preparing them to properly view the Crucified One. If punishment was God’s aim, then He would not have laid their punishment upon the Serpent on the pole, representing and foreshadowing His Son on the Cross. And so God commanded Moses to make a fiery serpent and lift it up on a pole before the eyes of those who were serpent bitten.

The dying multitude could then find healing and life by simply beholding the provision of Christ on the Cross defined as a serpent on a pole (Numbers 2:5-9).

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Many of us may be familiar with those scriptures, but do they bear the impact to us that they were meant to? Do we appreciate the Cross beyond a mere religious glance? With the eyes of our hearts being enlightened, we can behold the spotless Lamb of God Who had joined to us and therefore taking the form of a Serpent on a pole and bearing our sin. We can take His death in and behold to the very core of our being what this death represents. When we are made aware of our condition, we will more deeply appreciate His. How much more focused the eyes of the Israelites may have become that day as they stood before the pole full of serpent bites, knowing that they were the cause of this horror being lifted up before them. Even so today, we can fix our eyes on the Cross and never let go of the grace that was wrought through His

death for us to be delivered from death. We will know that where sin has abounded to a desperate degree, God's grace has much more abounded as we behold the Serpent on the pole. We will be brought back to the wonder of His sacrifice and the amazingness of His grace. We will glory in His Cross alone and seek to be found only in Him knowing that we have no righteousness in ourselves.

The Importance of the Landmarks

*"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: **but God is faithful**, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will **with the temptation also make a way to escape**, that ye may be able to bear it"*
(I Corinthians. 10:13).

God did not give His commandments to Israel in order to beat them into submission. God is not like Pharaoh. God's way is to bear our death for us that we might fulfill His commands through the Life of His Son. God provided them with all that was needed when He gave them His Lamb, exemplified in the touchstones we have just discussed. The Lord did more than fix their problems; He replaced their inward nature with His Life.

It is important that we do not let these touchstones pass us by, for then the wilderness will become a place of stagnation and endless wandering. The Lamb is the way of escape from a life of vanity and carnality. God has provided the Cross of Christ as the way of passing out from the deadness of carnal Christianity into the fullness of Life in the Son. We can walk through this gate of the Cross and become liberated from our own selfishness through the grace given to become joint-heirs with Christ. *"Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter"* (Psalm 118:19-20). The Cross must be applied, and the Lamb must be eaten. His death will be to no avail for those who do not apply and receive Him by faith. Just to hear about the touchstones of the Lamb or understand their significance brings no change. We may find ourselves passing by these touchstones every year for forty years and never being translated out of our dry and carnal existence. With each time around our faith in the Cross will become duller. At these times, the Cross becomes a doctrine that seems impotent because it is not being laid hold of by faith. Unless we believe it will have no power in our lives.

Murmuring, rebellion and sowing to the flesh brings serious consequences to those who reject the Lamb that bore their penalty for them. If these times of crisis do not turn us towards Christ and Him crucified, then they will wrought destruction in

our lives. To truly be touched by Calvary will result in the transforming power of New Life in these areas. To those who believe, the preaching of the Cross is the power of God.

Until We All Come

“Until we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

The touchstones of the Lamb in the wilderness came to preserve the Body until full communion was accomplished in the Land. Very simply, God gave His only Son so that we would not perish but have Life! This is not just an individual thing, but provision for the entire congregation to enter into the fullness of Life in the Son as His Body! Joshua and Caleb remained in the wilderness for forty more years until the Body was ready to cross the Jordan. They knew from the Lord’s heart that His desire was for a Body and not just individuals.

Each touchstone in the wilderness bears within it the spirit of Christ’s death so that those outside of the way (Hebrews 5:2) might receive life and once again be brought back into the communion of the Body rather than being cut off to perish. God’s heart is for all to enter in and that not one perish. He has made the way for this to happen. The Body strives together until “we all come”, entering into His fullness as one new man. For this glorious end to be accomplished God had to provide His Lamb.

The Power Of God To Them Who Believe

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”
(I Corinthians 1:18).

The Greeks seek wisdom and the Jews follow after signs, but a crucified Christ answers all needs to those who seek life. We will perish in our own wretchedness unless we look past knowledge and miracles to lay hold of the Lamb Who was slain to give us Life. He is the power of God to those Who believe. We are saved from our own selves and brought into His Life. To preach the Cross may seem foolish in the face of a serpent bitten multitude and murmuring masses. To lift up the Lamb among defiled and lusting crowds may seem like an odd response to sin and lack, yet it is God’s response to the old creation. It will not quench the thirst of one who seeks knowledge, nor will it satisfy the desire of those who must have outward shows. But to hearts that seek Life outside of themselves, it is the power of God if they believe.

In our own eyes and to the eyes of men we may be thought of as foolish, nothing,

weak, and despised. But it is in our own lack that God's wisdom exposes the mystery of His Cross, a crucified Lamb that gives life to all who will believe on Him. We must extend forth our faith and embrace God's eternal touchstone, Christ and Him crucified.

Conclusion

God has ordered our wilderness experiences to be unto Life. He has unveiled the beauty of His Lamb to bring those who are perishing into Life. He has lifted the Lamb high up from the earth so that all men will be drawn away from their own lack into His fullness. In that sense, all these things are meant to work together for the ultimate end of bringing us into conformity to the image of His Son. The wilderness experience is not just one of dryness, trial, and failure, but of discovering the wonder of God's love that sent His very own Son.

Touch the Lamb with your faith and let His virtue flow into you. Understand that Christ was slain even as the Rock was cleft so that from His death we might receive Life. Behold Him lifted up on a pole, bearing our death, and be healed from the poison of the old nature. Apply Christ as known in the ashes of the red heifer that was utterly and totally consumed and be brought out from the farthest reaches of defilement into Life. Partake of Christ freely and eat no matter what state you are in. Immerse yourself in God's provision and be brought into a land that flows with milk and honey. Embrace this union that causes a dry wilderness to bud and blossom. Today is the day of salvation if we harden not our hearts but enter in by faith!***