

The Heights Baptist Church

THE SILENCE OF GOD • MATTHEW 4:1-11 • 3/14/2021

MAIN POINT

Only those who have wrestled with a silent God are ready to hear Him speak again.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Describe a time you have spent in the spiritual wilderness. What caused you to be there?

How do you think God feels when you are in the wilderness?

At one time or another, all of us seeking the will of God come to a place in our journey that seems impassable. Some have called this season “the desert.” Others have referred to it as “the wilderness.” John of the Cross (1542-1591) was no stranger to the struggle of being devoted to God but feeling locked in a standstill. John of the Cross spoke of his experiences of being moved from an elementary stage of faith to a deeper, more advanced place in his relationship with God. It was a time when he didn’t hear from God, didn’t sense his presence. John called this experience “the dark night of the soul.”

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

If God’s ultimate will for our lives is for us to be like Jesus, don’t you think that He is going to do some of the same things in our lives that He did in His Son’s while He walked among us? If that is the case, then wilderness experiences should be expected rather than feared.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 4:1-11.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.

Why do you think God’s Spirit did this at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry?

Jesus entered the wilderness after His baptism. He spent 40 days fasting and wrestling with the devil in the wilderness. It was in this first wilderness experience that Jesus’ allegiance was tested. The devil tempted Him to see if He would stay committed to God. Satan encouraged Him

to turn a rock into bread. Jesus side-stepped this invitation to break His fast with the confession that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Satan moved to the temptation of power. He took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and told Him that he would give Him authority over everything visible. Again Jesus refused, knowing that all authority had already been given to Him. The devil then challenged Jesus to prove God's love for Him. He told Him to throw Himself off the temple. Surely, God would send a legion of angels to save His Son. Jesus' response was, "I don't test God. I trust God."

Do you usually expect temptation? How can expecting it help you defeat it?

What specific temptations do you know that you are going to face this week? How are you going to arm yourself in advance to meet those temptations?

What can we learn from Jesus' first wilderness experience?

The affections of our hearts are tested when we are in the wilderness. When we are tired, lonely, and hungry, who are we going to turn to? Will we trust God's provision or take action on our own? In the wilderness, our motives are clarified, and our dependence on God is essential for survival.

How do wilderness experiences prepare you for the future?

How do you think God feels when you seek Him in the wilderness?

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 26:39.

Jesus was overwhelmed by what lay ahead of Him on the cross, so He entered the garden to seek God and His will. What followed was one of the most passionate prayer experiences ever recorded. Hear the confidence of Jesus in this prayer: "God, I know that You can do anything. You could take this cup from Me. I only want to do what You want Me to do, so if I am looking for Your will on this subject and not just Mine."

For Christ, the result of this wilderness experience was absolute confidence that He was living the will of God. It's interesting that even Jesus needed this level of assurance. He set the example for us as we look to confidently walk in God's will for our lives. In the midst of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain, He was able to pray for God's will rather than His own. Nothing would dissuade Him from confirming God's will in His life.

How was Jesus able to discern God's will in the midst of this wilderness experience?

How does the nature of our prayers this side of the crucifixion contrast with Jesus' prayers on the eve of the crucifixion? How does Jesus' agony and stress in that

moment speak to us when we are in distress?

Why should the disciples have been discerning enough of Jesus' emotional state in the garden and sensed the need to pray with their friend? When have you missed out on an opportunity to pray for or minister to someone who was in the wilderness?

It's clear that wilderness experiences are a key ingredient in God's plan to shape your life. God sent Moses to the desert for 40 years to prepare him to lead Israel out of captivity. Jacob wrestled with God in the wilderness. Even Jesus spent time in the "desert" as a part of His preparation for ministry. As a result, each of these men knew God more intimately and clearly discovered His will for their lives. Notice, too, that for each of these men, there was a designated time that they were in the wilderness.

For Jacob, it was a night. For Jesus, it was 40 days. For Moses, it was 40 years. It seems clear that though God might lead you to the wilderness, it is not His intention for you to live there. When God's desired activity is complete in you, He will bring you out of the desert.

**Does the result of spiritual growth from wilderness experiences outweigh the cost?
How so?**

Do you think most people draw closer or further away from God during wilderness times? What is your tendency?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some of the struggles and the benefits of going through the wilderness?

Do you need to adjust anything in your life—thoughts, behaviors, or actions—as a result of identifying these struggles and benefits?

Is there someone in your life who is in a wilderness experience with whom you can connect and commune? How can you best serve and help them?

PRAYER

Read and reflect on Philippians 1:6. Place your faith in God as you trust Him to sustain you in the driest of wilderness experiences.

COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 4:1-11

4:1-4. Jesus' temptation immediately followed His baptism. Many of God's people have faced strong temptations immediately after spiritual mountaintop experiences. Jesus' baptism has been viewed as the beginning of His public ministry. In His temptation, Jesus faced choices regarding how He would accomplish the mission God had given Him. Would He choose God's way or Satan's way?

At the beginning of these temptations, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert. Did the Spirit do the tempting? No, the tempter did. Although led by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus was tempted by the devil. An important note of difference between the work of the Spirit and the work of Satan is evident in this verse. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, but the devil was responsible for the temptation. This verse warns us that we must never blame God for temptation nor should we view Satan as having power equal to God's. The devil is always bound by what God permits.

Satan attempted to prove Jesus faithless. God permitted Jesus to be tested to demonstrate His faithfulness. Satan attempted to create division between God and His Son. The devil works against God's purposes and God's people. The temptations Jesus faced were real temptations. Yet He steadfastly and repeatedly resisted temptation (Heb. 4:15).

The temptations recorded in Matthew 4 happened after Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights. After a 40-day fast, Jesus was hungry. Jesus was both God and man. As a man, Jesus experienced the same kinds of physical needs we experience. What did the devil mean by the phrase "if you are the Son of God"? The phrase also could be translated "since You are the Son of God." Satan tempted Jesus to use His power for selfish gain. Would Jesus base His kingdom on selfish desires or on service? The devil looked at the desert with its barren rocks and tempted Jesus to tell these stones to become bread. Jesus responded to the devil's temptations by quoting Scripture. In this instance He quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3 to remind him that man does not live on bread alone. Jesus knew that human beings need physical food. But He also recognized people's greater need for spiritual food. We need every word that comes from the mouth of God. God's Word can satisfy our deepest needs.

4:5-7. Satan took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem and had Jesus stand on the highest point of the temple. Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself down from the high point. The devil quoted the written Word of God in his attempt to convince Jesus to claim God's promise of protection. Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12. These verses refer to God's protection of the faithful who remain committed to Him. As we might expect, he twisted the meaning of Scripture.

The psalm does not teach that God's people are free to abuse God's power to satisfy a personal whim. Why did Satan tempt Jesus to abuse God's power in this way? People are drawn to the spectacular. If Jesus jumped and was rescued in a supernatural way, He could gain followers. But He rejected the temptation to build His kingdom in this manner. Jesus again responded to temptation with the Word of God: Do not put the Lord your God to the test (see Deut. 6:16).

Jesus refused to abuse God's power. He refused to build His kingdom with spectacular displays of power. Jesus resisted the temptation to bypass the cross and His redemptive mission by refusing to yield to this temptation.

4:8-11. In this temptation Satan tried to tempt Jesus with instant power apart from the way of the cross. He tempted Jesus to use worldly methods to achieve His purposes. The setting was a very high mountain. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. The devil claimed the rule of the world and offered to resign his claim if Jesus would bow down and worship him. Jesus faced a clear choice. He could follow the will of the devil or that of God. Jesus would receive glory after His death and resurrection, but Satan tried to persuade Jesus to take the easy way and receive instant power, authority, and wealth apart from the way of the cross. Jesus knew, however, that the end does not justify the means. God's will cannot be accomplished by worldly methods. Note Jesus' firm response: Away from me, Satan! In this response to the devil, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only. God alone is worthy of worship. Jesus resolved to center His life on God's purpose. Jesus refused to resort to worldly methods to achieve God's purposes. Jesus knew that God's will cannot be done apart from doing things God's way.

| MATTHEW 26:39

26:36-38. The place called Gethsemane, on the west slope of the Mount of Olives, faced Jerusalem. The name means "olive press," so it may have been an olive grove with its own press. Jesus left eight disciples in one place, while he and his inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—went a little further for the purpose of prayer. Knowing the physical, emotional, and spiritual torture he was about to bear, Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. In deep sorrow, the Messiah-King instructed his three closest friends to stay near and keep watch with him, probably to support him through their own prayers.

26:39. Then, moving just a little further on, the king fell with his face to the ground—a posture communicating desperate entreaty— and prayed to his Father. He prayed if it is possible, knowing that his request could not be granted if he were to remain obedient. But Jesus' model is a comfort to us.

Jesus' request to be spared suffering and death was the desperate cry of a Son's heart to his Father. And his Father accepted it, as a loving Father—but without granting it. And the Son accepted his Father's love, but without receiving his specific request.

This cup refers not only to Christ's suffering and death (Isa. 51:22; Jer. 25:15-16; Ezek. 23:31-34) but even more uniquely to the Father's wrath upon sin. It was an anticipation of Matthew 27:46 and the Father's turning his back on him. Jesus' extreme grief was rooted in the fact that he was about to become the object of his Father's wrath—an experience that many people on earth will encounter in eternity, but which no one but the Son of God could possibly anticipate ahead of time.

The Father's holy wrath was about to crush the Son (see Isa. 53:10), when the Son had done nothing to offend him. Here Jesus was facing more than humiliation, torture, and physical death. He was about to enter hell. We can only begin to imagine how fearful this prospect was to him. He and the Father had always been one. No wonder he cried out in desperation! But we are not to confuse Jesus' honest expression of desire with a willful decision to disobey. In the same breath, Jesus continued, Yet not as I will, but as you will. As always, the Son remained thoroughly submissive to his Father.