

Wilderness Wandering (Part 1)

Suffering for Righteousness' Sake

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In the movie *The Ten Commandments* there is a scene in which Dathan, played by Edward G. Robinson, asks a question that is significant to every one of us. The scene takes place on the morning following the Death Angel's passing through the land, and the Israelites were in a joyous mood because they were passed over. I guess there were Egyptian dead all over the place. The background music in the movie had just swelled to a very vibrant march.

Joshua, played by John Derek, came to Dathan's home to claim his love, Lilia, played by Debra Paget. She was being held captive there by Dathan who was trying to lure her into a relationship. I guess that she had kept herself from him, and so everything still looks promising for Lilia and Joshua. Anyway, Joshua announces to Dathan that they were leaving their slavery, and Dathan, with a rather cynical and perplexed look on his face asked, *Where are we going?*"

Brethren, they *knew* where they were going! How do I know that they knew where they were going? It is very doubtful that any of them had ever been to the Promised Land, even as none of us has ever been to the Kingdom of God, but they knew the promise to Abraham, because Hebrews 4 says that "the gospel was preached unto them," and Moses would have told them where they were going.

Exodus 13:17-18 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: But God led the people about through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt.

They knew the land's location, but nonetheless it was still a vague generalized goal about which they knew few particulars. The most direct route to Canaan was through Philistia, but the Philistines were a warlike people, and surely they would have resisted the passage of Israel through their land, and Israel was in no way prepared to overcome them. Israel did not know that, but God did, and even two years later, on the very borders of the Promised Land, the Israelites lost their nerve, and they refused to confront the people of the land.

So here, at the very beginning of their pilgrimage, we mark the first of many completely unexpected twists and turns that would occur before they got into Canaan, signaling the clear pattern that God does not always lead one's life in the way that seems best to us.

Now questions begin to surface. Would Israel continue to follow, and if they did, what kind of attitude would they follow in? Would the uncertainties of the journey create anxieties too great to bear? We are commanded to live our lives by faith, so we too need to learn to trust God's judgment in the twists and turns that take place in our lives.

God says through Isaiah that He knows the end from the beginning. We say that we too know

the end, that it is the Kingdom of God. But the reality is, we have never been there and we do not know what we will be. John says that. "We know not what we shall be." We only know vaguely, and we truly do look through a glass darkly. And like the Israelites, we most surely have never been along the way there before, so we are totally unfamiliar on that account.

Go now to Numbers 13. This is just before God told them to go into the land, and they appealed to Moses to send out some spies, which he did, and now the spies are back.

Numbers 13:32-33 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

Numbers 14:1-4 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. [It does not sound like they were happy about this twist.] And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore has the LORD brought us unto this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

That was a twist and turn that they did not like at all!

Numbers 21:4 And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

Do you ever get discouraged because of the way to the Kingdom of God? Brethren, Israel's way was narrow and difficult. Is that not what Jesus said, that the way to the Promised Land, to the Kingdom of God, is narrow, and it is difficult, and few there be that find it, that find the way to the end?

It is just as stressful, but in a different way and for a much different end than it had been in Egypt. Their life in Egypt was hard, and there they were going to death. Now here they were, released into their liberty. They were free people, but they were finding that the way of liberty, the way of freedom, is difficult as well; just a little bit different though, and to a different purpose and end than it had been in Egypt. When God made that unexpected turn of direction, it becomes apparent that He had more in mind than simply taking Israel into the Promised Land.

Some more questions: How would people who had been slaves all of their lives use the liberty that had been given to them? The answer: They would use it, with a few adjustments, in the same way as they had been trained in Egypt. You probably heard the cliché that "Israel went out of Egypt, but Egypt never left Israel." They carried it wherever they were. Their experiences as slaves in Egypt were virtually all that they had to go on.

Another question: How much experience had they had in governing themselves God's way? As

slaves, it is entirely possible that someone else had structured their entire existence, and from the time that they got up in the morning until "lights out" at night, somebody else was telling them *what* to do, *how* to do it, and *when* to do what they finally chose to do.

In Egypt they were hardly ever confronted with making truly meaningful decisions pertaining to their life. A slave does not have many choices. In addition to that, and also very important, is that the spiritual, moral, and ethical instruction and decision-making experience that they did have in Egypt was from an anti-God system.

Go now to Numbers 9 as we continue this saga. We are going to read all the way through to verse 23 because I feel the whole thing is important to the foundation of this sermon.

Numbers 9:15-23 And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle: according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Do we see God in our lives with the clarity that at least Moses and maybe the Israelites saw God in their lives? Our lives, brethren, once converted, are totally tied to where God is leading. Do we understand that? That is what this paragraph is showing those who are converted.

If we are starting out on a journey we make all kinds of advance preparations in the hope that we can meet any eventuality that can occur. If it is the Feast of Tabernacles, we make arrangements with a motel. We think about the clothing that we are going to need for every occasion, whether it be rain gear, or whether we going to need warm winter clothing, or summer-like clothing. How about sufficient money, credit cards, and having the automobile in good repair? You plot your route, and you project ahead. All the time you are thinking ahead, making preparation.

Now consider the contrast. God led Israel through the wilderness. "Wilderness" does not necessarily mean a barren desert, though that would apply. It could also apply to Antarctica, or

for that matter an African tropical jungle, because the basic meaning of the word is that of uncharted territory—a place in which there are no roads.

Recall that Moses asked his father-in-law Hobab (Jethro) "to be as eyes for us." In other words, to be a guide, because he was familiar with the area. The only visible guidance was by the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The cloud and fire were symbols, or the vehicle, of God's presence.

That circumstance all by itself added to a fairly stressful situation for them. In addition to that, they never knew *when* the cloud or the fire would move out, and so they had to be in a more or less constant state of readiness, with one eye cocked on the cloud. In that sense, brethren, God is showing that these people were living by sight. These people were dependent upon God for virtually everything in their life, and even the timing of things in their life.

When I was preparing that sermon, "Do You See God?", this was in the back of my mind. Do we see God leading us to the Kingdom of God, totally involved in the operations of our lives, and setting the way that we are going in this trackless wilderness—this area of life that we have never been through before? Israel never "got it."

Deuteronomy 29:2-4a And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land: The great temptations which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles: Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive.

Even as God had to provide food, water, and all those kinds of things, God also had to provide the ability to *perceive* what was going on. He also had to provide the ears for them to hear it and to "get" it, but He did not do it. He withheld that from them. The result of this was, according to Hebrews 4:1-2, that Israel never got the point of what was going on in their lives. Yes, they knew the name of the land they were headed toward, and they knew its general location, but they never grasped the significance of the land or the significance of the events as they went through them.

They never grasped the significance of Moses, of Aaron, of the giving of the law, or of being accepted into the presence of God at the mount. They never grasped the significance of the priesthood, of the tabernacle, of the ritual, of the making of the Covenant, of the manna, or the water from the rock, or the length of time that they trudged through the wilderness. They never made the proper connection, because they allowed their present difficulties to overshadow their trust in God's promises. The result was that the wilderness became strewn with their bones from Sinai to Canaan, and they died in their misunderstanding.

Let us compare this with modern American out there just ever so briefly, and what we will call "Christianity" at this point. In a *Newsweek* article titled "Heaven" that appeared in the March 27, 1989 issue, it stated that 94% of Americans believe that God exists. Seventy-seven percent believe that there is a heaven, and 76% believe that they have an excellent chance of getting there. But brethren, the reality is that heaven is not the right goal, and all kinds of unrealistic ideas have been formed and believed about it, and people are leading lives motivated by wrong goals and perceptions about life and its purpose.

Many of you may have read *Alice In Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Many today seem to think that it is a children's story about zany characters dwelling in a fantasyland that Alice fell into by accident. Well, it was far from that. Mr. Carroll wrote it as a political satire describing the madcap political scene of England at his time of life.

At one point in her journey, with Alice attempting to get back to where she began, where she fell into by accident, she ran into a conversation with the Cheshire Cat. This is very interesting.

"Cheshire Puss," said Alice, "Would you please tell me which way I should go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you walk," said the Cat. "So long as I get somewhere," Alice added. "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough!"

The question for us is, "Where will you be?" Where will Americans be at the end of their lives, believing that they are going to go off into heaven? Today's world religious scene gives one the definite impression that God does not have a plan, and His only purpose is to save us. But brethren, God has both a purpose and a plan, and it is important that we know who we are, and where we are going, and why we go through what we go through.

Would it not be helpful if we had a road map so that we can anticipate and be prepared to meet the challenges of each part of the journey for us into the Kingdom of God? Well, God has supplied us with such a document, and in one sense it is the whole Bible. But more specifically, it is the first five books. God has not left us without guidance, and actually He has blazed a fairly clear trail that contains the basic events and the significance of those events as we travel along the way to the Kingdom of God.

Let us go back to Exodus 2. Here is where it begins.

Exodus 2:24-25 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

God initiates the calling, as He did with Israel, and as He did with us because of His faithfulness to His covenant that He made with Abraham that contains the promise. He has respect unto *His* purpose, not our work or our talent. What does a slave have to offer to God's purpose? Technical ability? The ability to lay bricks, or to lay things out on a piece of paper, or do electrical wiring, or whatever, or craftsmanship, regardless of how skilled?

But God has already demonstrated in the creation of the earth and of us that He does not lack any of these qualities. He does not need anything that we can give to Him. We are so insignificant and so puny, and yet we are so proud of our puniness that it leads us into wrong evaluations again and again. But God does lack something. He lacks a family with *His* characteristics, and so God rescued His people, and it begins at a set time. He makes very clear of that—"at the *set* time," "at the *appointed* time." I think that this comes down to each one of us as well.

He also gives a general principle that the "set time" is when the iniquity of the Amorites is full. Well, that is what happened when Israel was called out of Egypt. The iniquity of the Amorites

was full, and so the time had come for God to kick them out of the land of Canaan and replace them with the Israelites. The iniquity of the Amorites of this world in our day and age is coming to the full, and soon our inheritance is going to come to us.

Turn now to Exodus 19. This is after He had them free and He had them at Mount Sinai.

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak unto the children of Israel.

God got them out there and He gave them an offer of an agreement, a covenant, but it had conditions tied to it. This offer tends to show future potential. They were set apart to obey and progressively become a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. If, when they agreed, they were those things only in their first stage. They were not fully that then. It was the experiences in the wilderness that were preparations for what they were to become once they entered into this agreement. So in Exodus 20-23, after they said "Yes, we want to do this," God then gave further terms of the agreement, of the covenant, that He was offering to them. Then in chapter 24 came the full acceptance of the agreement.

It is good to stop just a second here and let you understand that Israel had good intentions. I do not mean to in any way lead you to think they did not have good intentions. They *did* have good intentions, but what happened in the wilderness shows that they were not committed, because of their lack of faith. Because of this things kept going awry. But always remember God was still leading them. He was writing the Book, and from their experiences with Him we learn very much about what God is leading us into and through in order to become inheritors of the land.

Let us jump another forty years to Deuteronomy 4. Please keep following the parallel here. We are looking back over forty years of experience that these people had with God.

Deuteronomy 4:5 Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do so in the land whither you go to possess it.

Does that not tell you something? The parallel here is showing us that He is preparing us for taking over the land, and that the things, the lessons we are learning, the experiences we have, are preparing us for that time so that we can use them fully in our inheritance.

Deuteronomy 4:6 Keep therefore and do them: for this [the things that God has taught] is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

They did not really bring any wisdom or understanding with them coming out of Egypt. Their wisdom and understanding came from the preparations that God put them through as He led them along the way.

Deuteronomy 4:7-8 For what nation is there so great, who has God so near unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is

there so great that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

With that in mind we are going to turn to Deuteronomy 8. Remember, we are still looking back on the forty years of preparation. This is very important for us to understand as we go along the way

Deuteronomy 8:1-2 All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, . . .

Do you believe that God is with you, leading you all the time, all along the way? Now He was with these unconverted people, and He would *surely* be with us.

Deuteronomy 8:2 . . . to humble you,

The first of the Beatitudes has to do with humility, and humility, above all things, has to be acquired by us, because pride is *the great sin* that separates us from God—this idea that we already know is what keeps us from yielding to Him.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 . . . and to prove [test] you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not [nor had experience with, and] neither did your fathers know; [Neither did your fathers have any experience with that]; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word [A man lives by *trust* in the Word of God] that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live.

The implication to you and me all along here is we live everlastingly, eternally, because of trust, because God has led us through experiences.

Deuteronomy 8:16 Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that he might humble you, and that he might test you, [Why?] to do you good at your latter end.

God makes clear in a general way here that He was involved in *all* of their experiences *all* along the way. In many cases, when we look at specific events, He was directly the Author of them—of those trying times that they had—because He says right here, He admits He made them hunger. He is as good as saying, "There were times that I didn't allow you to have food to eat." "There were times that I didn't allow you to have water to drink." Well, that will test your attitude!

But the purpose of all of this is to prepare us for the latter end—the Kingdom of God—to make us *qualify* to live in the land, in our inheritance, to get rid of the leaven of our former life in Egypt that would corrupt the Kingdom of God. In effect He is saying, "Don't let it get into your head that you built all these things that produce your prosperity, whether it's physical or spiritual." He is saying that if He did not do what He does, we would still be in Egypt, and we would not be prepared for the Kingdom of God, to a way of life that He wants us to live.

The Word of God contains instruction as to how to satisfy our deepest longings and produce a

stable, peaceful society. But brethren, we are finding that this requires discipline and sacrifice and hard work. God has offered us these things. He is with us the whole way, but we have to *prove* to Him by the way that we live that we are going to be prepared to inherit that. He is saying that real life, abundant life, eternal life comes from, or is produced from, total commitment to a way of life in which God is involved. Another way of putting it is that real abundant living comes from fulfilling God's purpose.

To do this is to make us humanly very uncomfortable at times, because human nature will fight back. He is preparing us then for the long-term reward, and it is greater than anything this world can offer, and that along the way, because of what He is providing, we can live life with a wonderful sense of well-being.

Let us go back to the book of Ephesians, and we will just follow the parallel here very briefly. Paul is writing and is speaking of us.

Ephesians 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of *His* will. . .

This is what I want to draw on right here ever so briefly. It was the good pleasure of *His* will that draws us into this.

Ephesians 1:9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself.

So like the Israelites, we are called according to His will. Again, our works are shown to be of no import. It is essential for us to understand that it is not a matter of who the objects of God's predestination are, but it is what they are predestined *to* that is important. And what God does is done with a view to us as being sons.

I Peter 2:5 You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9-12 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul: Having your conduct honest among the Gentiles that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

The day of visitation for them is when they are called. They may not like what they see now, but when their time comes, God is going to bring this to their mind, and they will know what they saw then.

Peter details, or enumerates, the characteristics of the responsibility of the New Testament church. Notice how closely it parallels God's intention for Israel. This signals something to us, and this is that we are going to go through; we are going to experience, in principle, things that are very similar to what *they* went through. The implication is very strong, from the very nature

of the term, that what we are called to is going to require a multitude of changes of conduct and attitude in order to be prepared to carry out those responsibilities.

Are any of you royalty? Not yet. Are any of you a priest? Not yet. That is going to require changes in your life. Something else that he bears on a bit more frequently here is that Peter actually stresses a sense of community. For example, we are described as being a stone, but one stone does not a building make. We are joined with a lot of other stones. That requires that the stones be conformed to an already existing structure. Stones have to be hammered on, and that is not easy, and it may take a lot of time for the chips to come out of there in order to form it. Changes must be made, and changes make us uncomfortable.

When God calls, He is calling us both to a work and to be worked upon in order to fulfill this community. He uses the word "generation," and it means a body of people with a common descent. That is something new. We do not have common descent. We all come from different families, from different parts of the United States, and from different parts of the world, and our cultures are somewhat different. But we are called upon to become part of a *common* culture, which is *God's* culture.

He says we are to be not merely priests, but *royal* priests, and that indicates a body working for God in behalf of others. We generally do not do that now. He says that we are to be *peculiar*, and it speaks of something that is unique—private ownership of the whole group by one individual—God.

As we continue to follow the parallel, let us go to Hebrews 11. Again, these are common scriptures, but we are looking at them from a little bit different angle.

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. [Are you doing that? Are you seeking something?] And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, [Israel came out of Egypt.] they might have had opportunity to have returned. [Israel wanted to go back quite a number of times.] But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city.

Paul clearly shows here that the Kingdom of God is the goal. The intent of these verses is to project *movement*. "*Seeking*" means *movement*. Israel *moved* from Egypt to the Promised Land. Now we do not move anywhere geographically. Our movement is in the form of a change of heart—that heart that God withheld from the Israelites there in Deuteronomy 29:4. Because of this movement—change of heart—we are pilgrims ejected, drawn out, from one way of life to another. The movement is accomplished through an educational process requiring formal instruction, some of which you are receiving now, but also *experience* while going through the processes of life.

This world and its cultures are not our home. One of our major responsibilities is to hold and clarify the *vision* as we go through these experiences. That is why Hebrews 11:13-15 is in the book. So do not become impatient and quit because your needs seemingly are not being met.

Sometimes God makes us go hungry. You get the point! He wants to test us to see if we are going to hold the vision and allow it to grow, and whether we are willing to make the sacrifice to be devoted and keep on moving even though we do not feel like keeping on moving.

And so it comes down to a very simple question: What is more important to us? Is it what we perceive as our immediate need, or is it God's preparation for the Kingdom of God? Are you looking for a city, or are you focused on the here and now? Do you want your desires to be gratified right away? We all suffer from that problem, and very few of us have ever had enough training in this in the past, and so what our parents did not do God has to make up for in some way. Delaying gratification is *every, very* important. In the New Testament it is called "self-denial."

Our calling as kings and priests pretty much sets the parameters of our training. God is going through much the same things with us as He did with ancient Israel, only on a much higher spiritual level, and thus the training is going to be more intensive because of the higher calling and having to live and move by faith.

Go now to II Corinthians 5:6-10. Notice the strength of assurance given in these verses.

II Corinthians 5:6-8 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the [fleshly] body, we are absent from the Lord, [but we are moving]: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) [Faith is another word that indicates movement.] We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Paul was an advocate of delayed gratification, of self-denial, and so he was willing to be absent from the Lord and remain in the flesh because present circumstances in the church required that he continue the work Christ gave him to do.

II Corinthians 5:9 Wherefore we labor that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

He did not let his eyes get off the goal, and he was not going to just impatiently throw things aside to gratify his immediate desires. Why?

II Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.

To live by faith is at times a very difficult thing to do, because we spent our entire life living by sight, and we may yet have to change virtually every aspect of our life, especially attitudes toward God and other people, to conform to the way of a God we cannot see, but whose word we *must* trust. So "walk" suggests movement. It is the single most frequent movement virtually everyone on earth performs in going through the daily activities of life. So "walk" is making this area that we are to have movement through very narrow. It is what you do every day, and so the movement toward the Kingdom of God takes place in every activity of the day.

Our movement is not from country to country, but from activity to activity, involving spiritual, moral, and ethical decision-making. "Sight" here represents living and making decisions based on things discernible to the spirit in man. And faith here represents trust while living and making

decisions based on the insight given by God's Spirit into the realities of the eternal truths of God's Word.

To the Christian, Christ is present, not to sight, but to faith, and therefore he disciplines himself to live his life as though God is beside him. But the reality is, He is much closer than that. He *is* in us! He is in us by means of His Word, and our belief in His Word. The effect of living by faith is behavior whose constant aim is to please Christ. Because of faith, we know that we face Christ's judgment and must give account of ourselves as to whether we live by faith or by sight.

We are going to add here another factor that sets the parameter even more sharply as to the areas we are going to be tested in. That factor is: Are we suffering the sufferings of Christ?

Let us go back to I Peter again. Peter had a big thing for the sufferings of Christ, and there is good reason.

I Peter 1:10-11 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the *sufferings of Christ*, and *the glory* that should follow.

Now hang onto that!

I Peter 2:19-21 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when you be buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, *this* is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were you called. . .

Did you read that? Did he say that we were called *to suffer, to suffer wrongfully*? Yes, he did! That is why we were called. We were called to suffer wrongfully! I am not saying this stands alone. I am just saying that it is there.

I Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps.

That is as clear as anything. If you are a Christian, you are going to suffer, following Christ's example.

I Peter 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.

Do you understand that? He suffered even though He did not sin. Does that mean that we are going to suffer even though we do not sin? Yes it does. We are going to suffer, making life very difficult at times, making life living by *faith* very difficult at times. We are not always going to be suffering, but it goes with the territory.

I Peter 2:23-24 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes you were healed.

I Peter 3:17-18 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that

he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] by the spirit.

I Peter 4:1-2 Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin: That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

I Peter 4:12-13, 15-16 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. . . . But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

Is there any among us who fails to understand that going through what Israel went through in the wilderness was very difficult for them—perhaps especially psychologically difficult? It might have even been extremely tedious and boring in the extreme. They certainly endured a great deal of uncertainty that expressed itself in doubt and many grumblings.

Reflecting back on I Peter, in chapter one, it is primarily the crucifixion that is the focus of Christ's suffering, but notice it is plural—[sufferings], and also then includes things like rejection in His hometown, betrayal by His friends, being forsaken by His flock, the scourging that He went through, and the bad reputation that He earned from all of those who were talking against Him.

In chapters 2 and 3, the crucifixion is still in the picture, but some of the emphasis in Peter's writings begins to shift to *our* conduct under duress, and toward *Christ's* conduct under duress, as being our example. Bearing undeserved suffering is *good*.

In chapter 4, Christ's sacrifice has shifted almost out of sight into the background, and our conduct under duress is almost completely the focus.

In I Peter 1:11 and in I Peter 4:13, sufferings is plural, indicating magnitude and variety—many sufferings of varying intensity, but it means that all the sufferings He went through prepared Him for His present responsibility.

In I Peter 4:1, is it God's will that we suffer? The answer is "Yes." God *caused* the Israelites to suffer when He was in a perfect position to give them "the life of Riley." But He did not. Now Peter uses Christ as an example, despite the fact that He suffered even though He never sinned. Are we going to go through the same thing? The answer is "Yes," and we have to understand that if we choose to live as Christ lived, we are going to suffer.

It becomes clear therefore (and this is why I asked you to remember I Peter 1, and verse 11 especially) that the path to glory lies through *suffering for righteousness sake*—"the glory which shall follow." But we must understand that the good thing is *not* the suffering, but being so committed to God's will that devotion overrides personal gratification and comfort.

Now because Christ did it, we can be confident—because we are joined to Him; we are His body

and He lives in us—that we can also do it. Being willing to delay gratification, while carrying out our responsibilities, is going to bring suffering. And so Peter's advice in I Peter 4: 1 is that we arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ had. It is interesting it says "armed." It is indeed a military term. We do not arm ourselves in military battle gear, but we do arm ourselves with the spiritual battle gear so that we are prepared for the spiritual battles that will bring suffering.

We should understand that even as Christ had to bear the sins of the world as a whole, we, as priests in preparation, must also, in a small measure, or in principle, bear some measure of the sins of others and the suffering that this will bring. Every problem, brethren, every offense, cannot be resolved. We have to bear it, and get over it just like Christ did. And so He said, "Don't be surprised."

We are not supposed to seek suffering, but suffering will come if one is devoted to this way; but rejoice that the suffering is not coming because we are evil and undergoing punishment. It is a test supplied by God's discipline. Now suffering under these circumstances does wonderful things to a person's evaluation of himself and his outlook on life and others. A person's devotion to principle is tested by his willingness to suffer for it, and it is those who refuse to compromise with God's standard who are going to suffer.

I warn you, that if we compromise, the world is going to let us off the hook. Human nature will let us off the hook, and we will feel relief. But do you know what Hebrews 11: 35 says? Do you know what it calls it? "Accepting deliverance." Not good. Not good at all. What we have been called to indeed has a privilege of doing. This is suffering *with* Christ; that is, participating in, sharing in, being associated with Christ, as part of His body, in His sufferings—suffering for the same reason and purpose.

These sufferings of Christ which we share in common with Him are not the sufferings associated with the crucifixion, but the sufferings for *righteousness* sake while enduring the opposition of sinners previous to that time. So please understand that suffering for suffering's sake is not meritorious. If we suffer because we have sinned, we deserve it. If we suffer for righteousness sake, we share in Christ's suffering. We are going to look at this more specifically in Hebrews 2.

Hebrews 2:10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect [complete] through sufferings.

Christ is the Captain of our salvation, and I think that you understand that this word translated "captain" is in the Greek *archegos*. Translated into English, it means trailblazer, scout, author, pioneer. I personally feel that the best translation is the word "pioneer." He is the pioneer, with "author" being the second best one. It means someone who leads into battle. It means someone who sets the pattern, or blazes the trail for those who follow.

Christ came into the world not to gain status or political power, but to be the guide, setting the example for others to follow, and to endure any sufferings that resulted from him doing those things. It is His suffering and obedience to God's righteous purpose, as the trailblazer, that completed Him. It perfected Him. It completed Him, not in terms of character. Please understand that.

It did not complete Him in terms of character, but as the perfect sacrifice, and now High Priest. If He had not suffered, He would not have been perfected, because it would have meant that He had sinned by letting Himself off the hook. His character though was found to be perfect, but the suffering He did as a result completed Him so that He could then serve as our High Priest.

Hebrews 6:20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.

The word "forerunner" is where we got the title of our publication, and it is a different word from *archegos*. It is *prodromos*, and it means, in a similar way, "one who goes before; a scout." The emphasis is on scouting something out. We know what He was perfected for, completed for, and we also know that He has gone on before us to become High Priest, and He is soon-coming King of kings.

Since we are going to be kings and priests, and since He was the trailblazer for many to follow, it then follows that our experiences of the body and as individuals are going to be at least somewhat similar to His. The major differences will be in intensity. He did His without sin, so there was no spiritually corrupting influences to get out. We are already corrupted by the leaven of sin, and that has to be taken out by God's Spirit and by overcoming. But the path that we take is very similar to Christ's, because we are headed toward similar responsibilities and services. Brethren, even now we can enter, through prayer, into the Holy of Holies where He is.

Turn now to Philippians 3. Paul is explaining why he is doing what he is doing. One of the things that he did is that he found out his former life was nothing but garbage, and so he cast it aside, and he says:

Philippians 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

If we are going to be made like Christ, we are going to be made conformable through suffering.

Philippians 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Christ died sinless, and He attained the resurrection. The issue here is "coming to know Him" so that *we* can be resurrected! The object is to be so intimate with Christ's experiences by going through them *with* Him that we come to the end of *our* journey—the spiritual pilgrimage in which we live by faith—with a mind just like His. When Paul says, "If by any means," it is an expression of humility. It indicates his willingness to do whatever, regardless of how humbling it might be on his ego, and he was willing to pay the price. "If by any means," he was willing to suffer.

Colossians 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you [meaning the church there at Colosse] and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.

Paul does not mean in any way that Christ's sufferings are inadequate, nor does he mean that there is a predetermined amount of suffering that each person should go through. He is simply saying, expressing, that it is unavoidable if one is associated with Christ and living as a Christian. Paul knows that because he suffered in behalf of the church—Christ's body—he can

rejoice.

One of the things that can be extrapolated from this principle that Paul is talking about is that the church is continually built up by repeated acts of self-denial by its members, and that self-denial—those sacrifices—is going to be painful to human nature. That is what he is talking about here.

We have become aliens within the culture around us, and aliens are usually persecuted and prejudiced against. So what we have are called-out pilgrims traveling along the way that is leading to the Kingdom of God, and we are being prepared for being a king and a priest. We have been assured that along the way there is going to be suffering. There are going to be sudden and unexpected twists and turns in the journey, and that we should be prepared for any eventuality. God warns us to be sober. To be sober means to be self-controlled, conducting our life with understanding, because it is this process, along with God's grace, that prepares and purifies us for what lies at the end.

In addition, the requirements of just keeping on moving, of not letting attractive digressions distract us, pulling us off the way, will always be pressuring us. Brethren, there may be injury, sicknesses, unexpected death, and even loved ones departing the way. But we are assured that the hardships that produce the suffering will be within certain parameters, and they will not be greater than we can bear. All of this must be done by faith.

I Peter 2:4-5 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, you also, as lively stones are built up a spiritual house. . .

We are living stones in a spiritual house. Metaphorically, in the Bible, when "stone" is applied to man it usually indicates stupidity, hardness of heart, unconversion. But when a person becomes converted, he becomes *living* stone—one of many in a spiritual house, building, or temple—and he does not remain alone. He must be built into the fabric of the church—the temple. He becomes part of a community, and the church is a community of living beings held together by a common bond. That bond is Christ.

The point is clear, that a stone by itself, lying out in a field, is pretty much useless. It becomes useful only when it is integrated into the building—the temple. By itself it accomplishes nothing, but joined with others, a structure capable of serving many purposes is built.

Brethren, there is no such thing as an independent Christian. Christianity, without the church, is an impossibility because the church is Christ's body, and no part of our body lives once it is no longer a part of the body. It dies. And so the Christian is trained, and thus his trials are going to be pretty much set by his association *with* the church, and God's calling for him as a king and a priest, or to be a king and a priest.

To a very great extent, we rise and fall with a spiritual state of this building. So please brethren, do your part in being willing to suffer the sufferings of Christ as He pulls us, drags us along the way, praying always that God will glorify what we are doing in His behalf.