



Finding God in the Darkness

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Antwuan Malone

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Antwuan Malone 0:00

I know that today is a together Sunday. So welcome to all of the whole family, the children, the students. So glad that you guys are here and present for today. And man, I'm really excited for what God has for us today. Now, how many people in the room? I don't know why I asked this. No one's how many people in the room remember the Twilight Zone? Okay, we got the Twilight Zone. The little, yeah, you maybe know someone did? I know the student section like, Yeah, we don't. We don't, we don't know anybody. The Twilight Zone was in the 60s. It began in the 60s. It was a show, kind of a horror, creepy, like show that often created these uncanny situations, little scientific science fiction, a little a little disorientation, a little dark. That's the Twilight Zone. And the passage we're going to get into today. I want you to turn there Exodus 20 verses 18 to 21 feels like a bit of a twilight zone for the Israelites. It feels like a little bit of a twilight zone for the Israelites. Now, as you turn there, I if you are walking into this next season, or maybe you've been in a season, you may be in a space where you feel like you're in the twilight zone right now, I feel like our country has been in the twilight zone for the last 10 years, but we can talk about that one way or the other, but I feel like I feel like that the world seems upside down like things feel upside down like unexpected things, and it can be very difficult to be a believer or a Christian, or to step into what God has for us when we believe ourselves to be in a twilight zone, in a space where everything isn't quite where it should be, and what up fills down, And down fills up. And so the Israelites, like I said, they enter into a scene that we're going to walk into. And I think for them, it's a little Twilight Zone ish, it's a little, it's a little bit of a Twilight Zone episode here in Exodus. It reads this way. It says now all the people witnessed, the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, you speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said to the people, do not fear, for God has come to test you, and that his fear may be before you, so that you may not sin. So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was. If there's something I want you to zero in on, I want you to 01 on that last verse, verse 21 it says so the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Say a prayer with me real quick, Father God, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to your sight. Oh God, you are my strength and my Redeemer. I'm just a nobody trying to tell everybody about somebody who can actually save anybody. Hide me behind the cross. Let whatever is said and done this morning that you will be glorified, that your son will be exalted, and that your Holy Spirit will be manifested in our lives. This is your service, prayer in Jesus. Name Amen, three things we'll talk about today out of this passage. One, God in the wilderness. Two, God in the darkness. And three, an invitation for all of us, God in the wilderness, God in the darkness, and an invitation. Now we start in the wilderness, because that's where the Israel, the story of Israel, begins at this point in the story, God has rescued Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians. He's done the 10 plagues. He's done. He's crossed the Red Sea with them, and they are now entering into the wilderness. In fact, if you take a look at at Exodus 15, you see that they had this full on worship service right on the banks of Red Sea. It's the song of Moses and the song of Miriam, and they're excited, and they're jazzed up, and it's everything you would expect right after you have been rescued or delivered from, whatever it is you've been rescued and delivered from. And I'm sure all of us have had moments like this, where God has shown up in a major way, and after that, at that showing up, but we feel the elation. We feel the celebration. We praise, we worship, we honor God for. Who He is in 15:21, to 24 Miriam song says, Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider. He is thrown into the sea. But then right after that verse, we enter this verse. And it's this verse, it says, So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and then they went out into the wilderness of Sure. And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. What a Debbie Downer, after all the worship and all the praise and all the the elation, three days later, they're wondering where they're going to get their next drink, the celebration, the deliverance has turned into drought, the salvation has led them to a wilderness. I don't know if

that's the way it's felt like for you, but sometimes like we can feel the salvation. We feel the connectedness we got, we feel God show up in a miraculous way, and then oftentimes, right after he shows up, there's these moments of drought, there's a moment of wilderness, there's a moment that we don't expect, I don't imagine, that the Israelites pictured wondering where their drink was going to come from when they prayed for deliverance from Egypt. Now they don't end up here by accident. They didn't fumble themselves into a wilderness. God led them there. God intentionally put them there. The wilderness is a space that is inevitable, that God will often lead us into as we come out of moments of deliverance. The Wilderness often follows deliverance and anointing. Hear it again, the wilderness often follows deliverance and anointing. We see it in Scripture. We see it all over. But there's Jesus. Was a great example. We see in Luke four, right after Jesus is commended by God, he says, This is My beloved Son whom I well well pleased. He's baptized by, by John the Baptist, and he is and a dove descends, and it's this great miraculous scene. And then the scripture says in Luke four, one through two, it says, And Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The wilderness followed the anointing. The Wilderness followed the deliverance. And being tempted for 40 days by the devil, he ate nothing, and afterward, when he was ended, he was hungry. Needless to needless to say. So we have the Israelites who are delivered into drought. We have Jesus who's commended into hunger. And then, of course, Paul, I'm just one more. One more example. Paul and his road to Damascus, he meets Jesus again. Fantastic. Way knocks him over. His horse, lets him know who he is, calls him out, changes his name, changes everything there is about him. And then Paul, the Scripture says, in Acts nine and eight, it says, And Saul arose from the ground after he had this miraculous experience, and his eyes were opened, but he saw no one, but they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus, and he was three days without sight. Neither ate nor drank. Now Paul just had to outdo everybody right? The Israelites couldn't drink, Jesus didn't eat. Paul's like, I'm just not going to be able to see now, I'm just going to be blind and I'm not going to eat and drink. But the reason I bring this up to you is because it's not unusual for deliverance experiences to lead to wilderness experiences. It's not unusual, and we see it throughout scriptures. And my encouragement to you this morning is, if you find yourself in a wilderness moment that's not you don't have to be surprised by that. God hasn't left you. It's quite possible God is leading you and putting you in the tough season that you may be in for very specific purposes.

Antwuan Malone 9:24

Now salvation leads to this, this disorienting journey of discipleship. We've been talking about discipleship all year, and discipleship we've characterized as a journey, as a, as a, as an adventure that we that we get to be on with God as he continues to shape and mold us into who we already are in Him and in this wilderness. The wilderness is the context for that spiritual formation. If you find yourself in the wilderness today, it's quite possible that God is putting you in the context. It's the gymnasium for your. Prayer for the strengthening of your walk with him. It's the space that God's going to use to craft who he wants you to be and to form and refine who you are. There's quick three quick ways, I think we can think about the wilderness and what God is doing in the midst of them. And like a good I was about to say Baptist preachers, we're not Baptist here, but I grew up so in the wilderness, just three R's. In the wilderness, God does three things. He resets us, he redirects us and he refines us. He resets us, he redirects us and he refines us. This is often done in the wilderness. This is often the reason why you're in the wilderness in the first place. For the Egyptians, he reset them. He reminds them of who they are, instead of who they were in in Exodus 19, five to six, he says to them, you are no longer slaves of Egypt, but you are a holy nation of priests. For you and I, he resets us to remind us that we are no longer slaves to sin but sons and daughters of the King, that we no longer are enslaved to the to the habits and the and the and the machinations of the flesh inside of us, but the spirit is now indwelt inside of us, and we can live out of a brand new identity. This is the reset that happens often in the wilderness, because sometimes we have to have things taken away from us in order for things to be made known to us, for things to be revealed to us, for us to be reminded of who we are. In Christ, He resets us, he redirects us. He re shaped the direction of our lives, the purpose and the meaning for who and why we are. We no longer live a life for survival and pleasure, our own survival and pleasure, but for the mission and purposes of God. He redirects the meaning of our lives, the why in our lives. It's an interesting experiment, I think, to at this time of the year, as we move from one season to the next, to ask yourself, what is your why? What is your why? What is the thing that drives and directs you? Sometimes, God wants to have something to say about that why? And then lastly, he refines us. He refines us to live and love the way Jesus did. He begins to put inside of us the kingdom ethic, the he begins to challenge our habits and our instincts shift them and calls us into the true nature of who we are, as believers, as indwelt, as the spirit is indwelt inside of us, he calls us away from man made norms, man made morals, man made targets. Right? This is what God is doing in the wilderness, resets us, redirects us, and refines us. And I believe this in the wilderness that God is doing some of his best work, that if you find yourself in the wilderness, you should expect a mighty move from God in your life, you just tell God to move in amazing ways for him to undo and to reshape and to push you into new spaces and places for you to go. So that's God in the

wilderness. Now let's talk about God in the darkness. So Egypt was in the wilderness, but then they come across as they're in the wilderness, already disoriented, already hungry. This is about 90 days later. Once we get to this part of the passage, 90 days has passed from their Red Sea, and so now they're still in the wilderness. Things haven't changed all that much they do. They are getting mad. There's a bunch of things that's happening. But in the disorientation, they come across this scene, this dark cloud, this thunderous cloud that that shows up, and of course, they're afraid, which makes all the sense in the world. Let's reread it. It says, now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. And this is why I think it's a little bit like the Twilight. Bit like the Twilight Zone, because you and I probably wouldn't imagine God shows up that way. In fact, when I asked the question, when I think about this pastor, I often wonder, like, God, why did you choose? You could have chose a ton of things. He chose a dove in John four, right? Like he could have chose a bunch of things to show up. Why did he choose to show up in such a way that it would inspire this fear in them? God does something that I think is unusual. Then they said to Moses man, you speak with us, and we were here, but we don't want anything to do with God, like if that's what's going on with this dark. Out, and it's all this like, Hey man, you go do the thing. We'll talk to you. You talk to him, and we'll be good, right? So we see, we see that this is what happens now again. Why does God choose to reveal himself this way? He could have been more invited. He could have chose a rainbow. Did that before. I think there's a couple reasons God shows us this. And I think it's in verse 20. When we read verse 20, it says, And Moses said to the people, do not fear, for God has come to test you. And we'll pause right there. I think the reason God shows up to disorient the already disoriented with a dark cloud to show up as a dark space, a scary, foreboding image in an already uncomfortable space. I think he does it. The scripture says to test them. God wants to test them now. Now test here. Loves us. We think about tests. We think about, like pass or fail test, a test that tells you whether you're in or out, that qualifies you or disqualifies you, some sort of test like that. But I don't believe that's what the scripture is actually saying here. The test here actually has very little to do with condemnation or disqualification. It has everything to do with training and teaching and developing. You might even say discipling. You might even say that what Moses says God has Do not fear God has come to disciple them. It changes the tenor of the text. And as you think about your wilderness and maybe the very specific thing in that wilderness, the most scary, foreboding thing that's there. It's quite possible that God is using that to disciple you, to develop you, to train you, to form you. It's not a test of worth. It's a development. It's time for you to take your next step in your spiritual formation. And then for the for the Israelites, what this meant was that they were going to get the law. This is where God had introduced the law. So he was about to say, Hey, this is going to be the way I want you to live. And that's what it was for them, but for you and I, maybe something different. It may be that God is calling us. We'll talk about this in a little bit. We're into into some The next thing that feels daunting or scary or unfamiliar as God resets, as God redirects, as God refines, what that actually means for us is the things that we're used to, the status quo, the relationships, the customs, the ways we're used to living, those things are going to be challenged. That's what refining is. That's what redirecting is. It is a change. It is a shift. It is a formation and a transformation. God is inviting them to transformation. He's inviting them to development. He's inviting them into the next thing. And I think for them, it feels like darkness, and it feels like a massive dark storm in reality, this darkness is an opportunity for discipleship.

Antwuan Malone 18:33

It's not comfortable, it's not stable, it doesn't feel secure. It feels risky. It feels dangerous. It feels scary, unsafe, unsettling. Which brings us to the second reason, and as a result of that, we fear it. We're afraid of it. Before I go to this next point, I want you to this sermon is about your ultimately, your spiritual formation journey, something I don't know that we think a lot about, where is God taking you, and is he taking you somewhere that feels scary? And if he is, the Scripture is meant to speak to it. You don't have to be afraid. Now, the first reason why we saw in the passage was the test. But when we go back to 20, the second reason that we see that that God may have shown up dark this way is because he wants them to he wants to deal with fear. Now, Moses does it a couple ways. When you look at the passage, he says, Do not fear. And then later on in the passage, he says, but it's for the fear of the Lord as for but it's for the fear that that God is doing this. So we have fear two different words, same word, two different applications. Let's talk about those quickly. The first Moses says it's fear not and this is the. Encouragement as you walk into your wilderness, as you take a step into your spiritual next moment, the space that feels dangerous or scary or unsettling that you don't have to fear. Now, Moses is talking about fear that is associated with danger. He's saying, Hey, you don't have to be terrified of God. That's the whole word. You don't have to be terrified of God, because that sort of fear produces fight or flight, right? We, with me, that sort of fear produces fight or flight. And man, we don't want to fight or flight God, right? The fear of God calls us to run away from him or to compete against the thing that he's called us to. It leads to separation from God. You can start to see it in 19 I joked about it. They already taken a step back. They're like, hey, Moses, you need to step in the in between here. I'm a little right. And maybe

that's how it is for sometimes us man, God calls us to something. He's calling us to that next thing, and we take a step back and hope that maybe somebody else can fill in. It produces this sense of, I must protect myself and my relationships from God. That's what this fear does. This fear the fear where Moses says, Do not fear. He says, Hey, you don't have to protect yourself from God. You don't have to protect the things that matter from you, from God. You don't have to protect the relationships. The reason he's saying that is because those are things that feel like they're in danger. Those are the things that God is challenging, is coming for in this next season. He says, You don't have to be afraid. You don't have to protect yourself and your relationships from God. In my ministry career, done a lot of church thought things with churches. We my wife and I entered a season. I believe I've characterized this way. I don't know that she but she said it this way, where she, when my wife has had to feel like she's had to protect me from the church, and there's a fear that, and I felt that way too, that that there's a fear there that says, hey, there's something about God's people that feels unsafe. There's something That's unreal as a result of there's tons of people who will walk away from church right now hurt from church, damage from church, because they fear God, because we lived in such a way and produced an environment that produces this kind of fear that causes us to roll go away. But here's the thing, when we're afraid of God, discipleship is a threat, not an opportunity, and one of the reasons that so many of us are stuck potentially in a wilderness season is because we have not taken the step toward God, and we end up lingering too long in wilderness seasons because we're afraid of what God has called us call us To, and we don't see it as an opportunity. We see it as a threat. As a result. We question God's love for us, His goodness. We forget our salvations. We step backwards from God. We question whether he's all powerful. We suddenly begin to retreat back into the things that we used to do, the things that used to hold us, the places of security that are no longer God, that we suddenly retreat, right? Because those are the things where safety is, those are the things where protection is, those are the place where I can feel safe. And so we run from God because we're afraid of God. And Moses says to us, Fear not. But then he does say later, he says to fear. He says that the he says that that his fear may be before them. In verse 21 as well, he's like, Hey, okay, I don't want you to fear. But the reason God is doing this because I want my fear to be before you. And what does that mean? Okay, Antoine, I don't want to be afraid of God. I want to I want to protect myself of God. But what does this other fear mean? This is the healthy fear of God. This is what the psalmist or the Proverbs were. Proverbs me when it says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, not the terrifying of God, but this fear that we're going to talk about in Psalms, 147, 11, it says, But the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear them, Fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love. That hope and that steadfast love is connected to the fear, a fear of God, rooted in hope, rooted in God's steadfast love, leads to trusting God. It leads to trusting God is a fear that leads us to believe the best things about God. God wants to inspire a trusting fear in him, a reverence that demonstrates complete, expectant hope and belief in the current. Competency and compassion of God. It is a fear that reveres the unlimited potential of God's power, love and goodness. To say it short, we trust God because He is all powerful. He's all loving and all good. And who could lead us in a tough How could he be leading us in a place that's not good for us? If all those things are true, even if it looks scary and difficult and dark, this sort of trusting fear enlists obedience and humility and sacrifice. It allows us to be corrected by God and not feel shame, but see it as opportunity to grow. It allows us to receive the discipline of God as a part of discipleship. Those two words connect, because it's all a part of the training and the development that God is doing in our lives. It allows us to see God as doing something good in us, even when it's unsettling for us, when we see the opportunities God lays before us, even in the disorientation of a wilderness, we walk toward them when we trust God not walk away. We do what Moses actually does in verse 21 where Moses says he drew near to the darkness where God was because he realized that the safety of the situation was in God, not around the darkness, that in the middle of the thing, that God is good and doing good things, and boy, do I want to be a part of his mission. Moses does what we all can do. We all can draw near to the darkness where God is. When we trust God fully, we see discipleship as an opportunity, not as a threat. When we fear God, we see discipleship as a threat. When we trust God, we see discipleship as an opportunity. Okay, so that's a lot. Number three, an invitation. I feel like that's a lot of abstract you can agree. You're like, Man, that was a lot. Okay, so what does it mean for me? Great, that's the problem. Talk about next. What does this mean for you? An invitation? I'm gonna try to say this as direct as I can, discipleship is not risk free. Discipleship is not risk free the journey that you are on to be who God to to become who you already are in Christ, in your discipleship journey is not risk free. It will be uncomfortable in seasons, it will challenge your status quo. In seasons, it will reshape your instincts and patterns and create seasons of disorientation in a fallen world, the cost and risk of discipleship are inevitable. The question is not what, whether it will be risky or costly, is, what will the risk and cost look like? Peter says, Do not be surprised when these fiery temptations come as though they were new.

Antwuan Malone 28:27

Jesus calls us to this when he Jesus has never been shy about this. He walks to a fisherman. He says, Hey, drop your stuff and follow me. And then the verse continues to go on. But if you think about it for a second, that means that they leave

everything that they know. He ends a career. They walk away from their home. They they walk away. Jesus says, take the risk with me. Will you drop everything that you have and follow me? Will you take the risk? Is it a risk and a cost. Jesus says, In Matthew He says, If anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. That's the invitation for you today. He goes on to say, whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake with will find it. Jesus is dealing with this tension. We were talking about, this protectionism that will arise in us when He calls us to hard or difficult things and he says, Hey, if you're going to try to save your life by disobeying or stepping away from me, you're actually going to end up losing the things, the true life that I have for you. He's dealing with that tension that we live in between survival and obedience and the unhealthy version of fear that pops up in our lives when we when what we think God has called us to it means some sort of loss. What does it mean to lose your life? For you? It. What does it mean to take a step into the dark cloud? For you, here's where we get super practical. It may be a relationship that you're unwilling to provide forgiveness for. It may be an enemy that you have in your brain right now, that the Lord wants you to be praying for and reconciled to, that you're unwilling to step into. There may be a marriage or relationship or a father or a son, or that is estranged, the relationship is strained or stretched, and and you're in the space right now where you're thinking, Man, I gotta take care of me. I gotta do me. It's gotta be I gotta protect I gotta protect me, and God is saying, No, the actual way for reconciliation is for you to lay down your life for the sake of this reconciliation. Perhaps you're a small group that has grown so accustomed to being together that you can't think of expanding. It feels unsafe and insecure. It feels irregular. Perhaps God has called you into an open, armed approach, and it feels different. It robs you of regularity. Perhaps there's a moment where God called you to step into serving your community, or to serve in this church in a way that's unnatural to you. These are all moments. These are all moments where God invites us to step into the darkness, to step into the unsettling, the unfamiliar, the places where we're like, God, I'll hold on to these things, but this area of my life, I'm just going to leave off Lion King. Here it is, it's the darkest shadowy I said, here it is because in our in our sermons, I said the Lion King is going to show up in my sermon, I don't know when it's going to show up. And here it is, it's the part. It's the darkest, shadowy places, he said, but we never go there, right, right? It's the new those places. These are the places where we're like, Hey, God, we don't really want you to touch those. That's the dark places. There are places in your life where God wants to be preeminent in and you have closed the door, you have locked the door. What is that for you? Maybe you're in a season of wilderness right now, and you need to know that God has put you there for your good, not for your destruction. Maybe you're in the wilderness and God is presenting the challenge of our in the opportunity for development, and it feels scary in a settling and you need to trust Him and not fear him. In the midst of it, say yes to the next thing. Here's what we know is true. In Isaiah, 45 three, God says this. He says, I will give you treasures of darkness and riches from secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord. I believe it's these secret places, these dark spaces in our lives, these places where we have this protectionism that God says. I've got something special there for you. I've got riches, not material, riches, Kingdom riches and treasures to reveal your life in these dark spaces. So like Israel, we can adopt a spirit of protectionism when faced with the next step of the journey in discipleship, we can adopt a protect me from God mindset that causes us to reject the reset, redirection and the refinement that comes from discipleship, or we can adopt a trust in God mindset that humbly submits to the path of scary formation toward living and loving the way Jesus lived and loved. I like to invite you to a season, a little moment of reflection, a sermon like this is easy to get in one ear and out the other. You go out and you do your you do your thing, you do your thing. We're going to do is just a minute. We're going to have the the bands on the place, music, and you don't have to sing through this. What I would like for you is to bow your heads at that time. And I want you to think about what where you are. Perhaps it is that you're in the wilderness. Perhaps God is calling you to the next thing, and you have not yet said Yes, perhaps you are afraid of God, and this sermon helped you realize that instead of trusting him, I want to invite you to take a moment and talk to God right now. Tell them what you feel. Tell them you don't like the wilderness. Tell them you're not you're not a fan. Tell them that. Tell him. Tell him that, that you wish he was less dark and more light, sometimes, that he would just show up in ways that would be easy for you. Tell him whatever you need to tell him, but draw near to Him. Don't go away from him. Ask him what he wants next. From you, what spirit, what the Spirit is doing inside of you. In this next season, we're going to do that, we're going to take a moment to reflect, and we'll come back and finish up. I'm.