

**March 6, 2011**

**THERE'S A WILDERNESS NEAR YOU** (by Bob Broadbooks)

*Ashes to Fire – Sunday 1 (With Jesus in the Desert)*

(March 13, 2011) – Lent 1

Matthew 4:1-11 (NLT)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. <sup>2</sup> For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

<sup>3</sup> During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

<sup>4</sup> But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, <sup>6</sup> and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

<sup>8</sup> Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. <sup>9</sup> "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

**THERE'S A WILDERNESS NEAR YOU.** That's not a threat. That's an invitation! There are 756 areas in the United States designated as wildernesses. The smallest is 6 acres in north Florida called Pelican Island Wilderness. The largest is over 9 million acres in Alaska called Wrangell—Saint Elias Wilderness. Congress by the National Wilderness Preservation System has protected wildernesses in 44 states and Puerto Rico. So I can confidently exclaim that there is probably a wilderness near you.

These wildernesses are rare, wild places away from the sights, smells and noises of civilization. You have a standing invitation to explore them. One settler in the early 1600's said that a "wilderness is a dark and dismal place where all manner of wild beasts dash about uncooked." But today, we can consider wildernesses differently. "A wilderness is not only a condition of nature, but a state of mind, and mood and heart" (Ansel Adams, photographer). Many find healing and meaning in the wilderness. It was to a wilderness that Jesus was led by the Spirit (vs. 1). There in this place of solitude, God allowed a difficult encounter for Jesus so that he could find a new preparation for His life. Wildernesses usually involve struggle. Whether it is hiking for miles through the forest to see a breathtaking view of the valley below or slogging through a personal temptation and finding the cool clear vision of victory on the other side, there is struggle. But the struggle is fruitful and powerful and life changing.

Today, I want to challenge you to welcome your wilderness. I know it is difficult. It is easier to live in the civilization of smooth roads and ordered lives. There we find the green lights and red lights. There we are told exactly when to go and when to stop. There the orderliness and schedules of our days keep us from thinking and wondering what is next. But in the wilderness, we will be moved by the change and the challenge.

I don't know what your wilderness may be today. We are told that there are two kinds of deserts. The one with which we are most familiar are the dry sandy deserts that have extreme temperatures and sparse vegetation. But there also exists permanent cold deserts that are almost devoid of life. You may be in a hot desert wilderness of spiritual dryness or in a cold desert wilderness of numbing depression or discouragement. This wilderness may have come into your life on the heels of a great spiritual victory. It was so in Jesus' life. Just before this, he was baptized by John the Baptist. The Spirit of God descended on Him and a voice from heaven said "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (3:17). Then immediately in the next verse, He is thrust into the wilderness. Whatever the dimension of your struggle, you can get through it. But you say, don't just give me nice platitudes. Tell me "how"!

Notice how Jesus got through His wilderness. He did so with three spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting and scripture. He prayed. I don't think he prayed for just a few moments each morning. I believe it was fervent, schedule-altering prayer. In fact He prayed for 40 days. He called on His heavenly Father for strength. He altered his eating habits. He fasted for 40 days. He subjected His body to great limitation so that His soul and mind could be clear to pray and think. Then He steeped His mind in the Holy Scriptures. We know that because as Satan tempted Him, Jesus said, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (vs. 4, a quote from Deut. 8:3). Then He said, "For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will strike your foot against a stone'" (vs. 6, a quote from Psa. 91:11-12). Next Jesus said to Satan, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (vs. 7, a quote from Deut. 6:16). And finally, Jesus said, "Away from me Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (vs. 10, a quote from Deut. 6:13). The passage says that as soon as he got through this, angels came to attend Him (vs. 11).

Friend, this is how you can get through your wilderness. Have you ever entered into an extended time of prayer, fasting and Bible reading? There is power available that perhaps you have never experienced. I have noticed in times such as these, that God is more near than usual. Tears come quickly. You find yourself thinking beautiful heavenly thoughts and saying uplifting, blessing-filled words. The Bible comes alive in greater fashion. It seems that angels are very near. As the song says, "Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. I can feel His mighty power and His grace. I can hear the brush of angel wings I see glory on each face. Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place."

Once you have gone through a wilderness with victory, you fear them no longer. I read about a woman named Jay Griffiths who had struggled with depression for many

years. She traveled to a jungle wilderness in the Amazon and discovered a natural drug that treated her problem with great effectiveness. She said of her discovery, "It was so powerful and effective for me, and there is something incredible in knowing that if that happens again there is a place that I can go." Jesus has taught us "that there is a place that I can go" for our wilderness struggle. If there is a wilderness near you, don't fear it. You will find God there. You will find healing there.

There was another man who prayed and fasted for 40 days in the wilderness. His name was Moses (Ex. 34:28). And when he came through that time, he delivered a great proclamation to his people. With a glow on his face from being in the presence of God, he gave the Ten Commandments. Jesus, catapulted from His 40 days of prayer and fasting, delivered a proclamation too. He began his preaching ministry with the bold declaration, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (4:17). And when you get through your wilderness experience, you will also have a story to tell. "Jesus is faithful. He has taken me through!" And the kingdom of heaven will be very near.

There is a wilderness near you. That's not a threat. That's an invitation!