

**Dear Fellow Redeemed,**

Today many people love living in the desert. You can almost always count on the weather being nice. You can golf all year round. But they only love it because they have figured out a way to provide plenty of water in the desert and have air conditioned homes and cars and places of work. You can escape the heat anytime you want.

Can you imagine living out in the desert for 40 years without air conditioning? Without ice for your cool drinks! And without a constant, stable source of water! Living in tents! Sand and dust in your eyes and in your food. That was not an easy life. It's a struggle just to survive.

King David describes his time spent in the desert of Judah in Psalm 63:1 "O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water." David was literally in the desert of Judah, probably when he was running from Saul. But this was also a dry and desperate time in his life, running for his life from a man he had served faithfully. David was unable to go to the temple to worship God and it may have felt like God had forgotten him. David wrote many Psalms where he expresses that feeling. Like Psalm 13:1-2 "How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"

Our life in this world can feel like living in a hot, dry desert. A lengthy disease or injury can leave you feeling like you are left out, missing the joy of life. The loss of a loved one can leave you feeling dried up with nothing to live for. Financial struggles and family turmoil, headaches at work, the stress of deadlines; many life circumstances can leave you feeling like an endless desert with no oasis. This world is also a spiritually dry place, which can leave you with doubt and fear, wondering where is God when I need Him? Even wondering if there is a god.

Our text for today gives us great joy and peace in the desert.

Psalm 68:7-8

*"O God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness, The earth shook; The heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God."*

Did you catch that? Where did God go? He went out before His people and marched through the wilderness with them. Remember this!

**God Doesn't Send You Anywhere that He Won't Go With You!**

So our theme for today is:

**God Goes With You Into the Desert!**

Psalm 106, which we read as our Old Testament Reading teaches three important Lessons:

**-I- Our Desert is the Result of Sin.**

The desert was supposed to be just a short journey for Israel as God led them to the Promised Land, but it turned into a lifelong ordeal. Why? Psalm 106:24-26 tells us very plainly, "Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word, but complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the Lord. Therefore He raised His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness." God brought them to the Promised Land and they didn't want to enter. They saw how good and rich the land was, but they were afraid of the people in the land and didn't trust God.

Psalm 106 describes Israel's real problem in verse 7: "Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; They did not remember the multitude of Your mercies." They didn't seem to understand from the 10 plagues that God sent on Egypt that God has power over all things. There is nothing He cannot do. They didn't seem to understand that God was doing all this for them because He loved them and wanted to deliver them and give them a better life. When new troubles arose they didn't remember God's power to deliver them. When the Egyptian army came upon them at the Red Sea, they forgot what God did for them in Egypt. Instead of trusting God and calling upon Him they accused God of evil intent, bringing them out of Egypt only to kill them in the wilderness. Yet God still delivered them. Only days later they ran out of water, and they and they didn't seem to think that the God who parted the sea and made a path through the depths of the sea, could also provide water in the wilderness. But God graciously, miraculously gave them water. Soon their food ran out and they still didn't get it. They didn't believe that the God who provided water in the desert could provide food for them. God in His mercy gave them bread from heaven.

They saw how God enabled them to defeat the Amalekites who attacked them at Mt. Sinai. But now they didn't trust God to give them victory over the people in the land He had promised to them. Instead they blamed God for bringing them out of Egypt only to kill them with the sword of the Canaanites leaving their wives and children to become victims. They wanted to choose a new leader to take them back to Egypt. (Numbers 14:1-4) Therefore God banished them to the desert wilderness for forty years. You see their extended time in the desert was the result of their own unbelief and rebellion and sin.

We get so fed up with the children of Israel when we read of one rebellion after another. But are we really any different? Do we understand and remember that the God who parted the waters of the Red Sea and provided food and water in the desert is the same God who has called us to be His own and saved us from our bondage to Satan, sin and death. Yet when some trouble comes up in our lives don't we still fear and worry? Do we think God has forsaken us? Do we blame God for our troubles or even accuse Him of not being fair or loving with us? Or do you wonder, "Why me?"

All our deserts of waiting, longing, struggling to survive, are all because of sin. They're not always a direct result of some specific sin as it was for Israel. The sin of Adam and Eve has brought God's curse upon the earth and life has been a struggle ever since. But when we live in sin and unbelief, stubbornness and rebellion, forgetting God's grace and mercy, we bring even more hardship and suffering into our lives.

The amazing thing we learn from God's dealing with Israel is that

### **-II- God Goes with Us into the Desert In Spite of Our Sin.**

This is truly remarkable. Israel was a stiff-necked, stubborn people who had outright rejected God 10 times. Every time they faced some lack or some danger they accused God of being an evil, malicious God, bringing them out of Egypt only to kill them with hunger or thirst or with the sword. What a terrible assault on God. They deserved to be banished to the desert. Yet, even when God banished them to the wilderness for 40 years, He still went with them!

Read the book of Numbers and you will see how God was clearly with them every step of the way. He still lead them visibly with the pillar cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He continued to protect them, provide for them and bless them. They continued to rebel and He continued to chastise them in love wanting to correct them. It is certainly true,

**God Doesn't Send You Anywhere that He Won't Go With You!**

Psalm 106 begins with the prayer we use daily. “Praise the Lord! Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” God’s mercy truly endures forever. How often do we murmur and complain about the deserts in our life? How often do we fail to trust God? How often do we outright sin and rebel against God’s laws? Yet He still goes with us! He still provides for us, protects us, loves us!

In fact during those entire forty years, when the people continued to rebel against God many times and in many ways, God still accepted the sacrifices offered by the Priests. All those sacrifices pointed to an even greater marvel of God’s love. He not only goes with us into the wilderness and endures our sins, He bore our sins, and suffered the punishment for them so that He could continue to be with us and bless us wherever we go. Since Christ died on the cross in our place, He can continue leading us through the wilderness of this life to our Promised Land of Heaven. The third lesson from Israel is even more wonderful, He not only goes with us, but

### **-III- When we Walk With God, He Makes Our Desert Bloom**

Israel teaches that lesson by their negative example. Their time in the wilderness was much more difficult because they didn’t trust God or keep His commandments. If the people thanked God daily for the food He miraculously provided for them instead of complaining about it, He would not have sent poisonous snakes in among them to bite them. If Korah, Dathan and Abiram would not have tried to usurp Moses’ position as leader, the earth would not have opened up and swallowed them and their families. If their followers had not continued to rebel, they would not have been burned by the fire of God. If the men of Israel would not have joined the Moabite women in their adulterous, pagan worship of Baal of Peor, 24,000 of them would not have died in a plague. They brought all these troubles upon themselves.

God gave them a sure promise, “If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.” Exodus 15:26 If we heed God’s word and do what is right in His sight and keep His commandments, He will bless us in the desert of this life and make our desert bloom. God promises through Isaiah, “The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. ... For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.” Isaiah 35:1-6

That is the whole point of Psalm 106. It is recalling Israel’s rebellion and sin and God’s enduring mercy, to call us all to repentance and teaching us not to follow in their ways, but to live in repentance and in loving obedience all our days. The Psalm says in verses 3-6, “Blessed are those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times! Remember me, O Lord, with the favor You have toward Your people. Oh, visit me with Your salvation, that I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance. We have sinned with our fathers, We have committed iniquity, We have done wickedly.” God is forever merciful. He goes with us into the desert. Trust Him! Listen to Him! Follow Him in His Word. And He will make your desert bloom!

Amen.