

Leaning on her Beloved

Difficult sermon!

Sleepless nights, praying.

S.O.S 8:5a

Who is that coming up from the wilderness,
leaning on her beloved?

S.O.S is my favourite book of the Bible. Reasons?

- Intimacy
- Jesus' passion for His people.
- His delight in us in spite of our weakness
- The level of intimacy that is offered to each one of us.

God's purpose

God's purpose for us is that we lean on Jesus.

The picture of the beloved here - the church - is of her leaning on her Lover.

= Leaning for support, He bearing her weight.

But **also a word signifying intimacy** - used only here in O.T. That is God's purpose for each one of us - that we learn to lean, rely on, solely trust in and depend on Jesus. That we go thru this year leaning harder on Jesus than we did last year.

That is His purpose. How He achieves it is another matter!

God's method

The picture we have of the church - and therefore the individual Christian - in this verse is of them **coming up out of the wilderness leaning on Jesus**. That is the key. We lean on Jesus coming out of the wilderness. In order to come **out** of the wilderness leaning on Jesus we have to go **into** the wilderness. In the wilderness we learn to trust, to lean, to depend.

What I want to do is briefly look at several places in the Bible where God took people into the wilderness and they came out leaning on Jesus.

Moses

Moses was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in a palace! He was living in one of the richest and most powerful families in the world at the time - **Act 7:22** *And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.*

Expand - Pyramids, astronomy, wisdom, learning etc.

At the age of 40 though what happened - God took him into the wilderness!

Forty years in obscurity! Forty years as a shepherd! God stripping him, working on him until one day he meets with God and what does he say - **Exo 4:10** *But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."*

What a change! God had stripped him of the "*I can do it*" attitude to the "*I can't do it!*" He was now **weak**

enough for God to use!

The next time we see him he is coming up out of the wilderness and appearing before Pharaoh with signs and wonders! He's come up out of the wilderness leaning on God!

- ***Not trusting in our resources***

Moses learnt what it was not to trust in his own resources or strength. I want to encourage each person here to study, learn, work hard - but not to trust in those things! The things are good in themselves but not to be trusted in or relied upon.

Do you want to be under a curse this year?

Jer 17:5-8

5 Thus says the Lord:

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the Lord.

6 He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.

8 He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit."

If you are a Christian and pressing into God more, don't be surprised if God takes you into the wilderness to strip you of self reliance.

- ***Man's ways***

So often we try to figure things out for ourselves, to work out how God should do things - do you ever do that?

Don't think you are immune!

Mat 16:15-17 Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar- Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Jesus called Peter blessed! *Without looking, what was the next thing Jesus called Peter a while later?*

Mat 16:21-24 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, **Satan! You are a hindrance to me** . For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Satan! Hindrance! How? Why the sudden change? Did Peter go off and dabble in the occult for the afternoon and play with a ouija board? No!

23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not

setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

That's the key! Peter was going man's man, man's reasoning, man's ambition, man's self preservation.

What was Jesus' remedy for this? Death! Take up your cross! Wilderness, stripping, death.

Israel

God brought Israel up out of Egypt to take them into the Promised Land - but what happened?

Why?

They didn't trust, believe or rely on God - **Heb 3:19** So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

So God held them in the wilderness for 40 years until all of that unbelieving generation had died.

When we next see Israel they are by marching round Jericho by faith.

How did they get to this point? Wilderness! Death! The very real striking down of a generation who was unfaithful - they died in the wilderness.

Jesus

At the start of His ministry God took Jesus where? The wilderness. What Did Jesus do in the wilderness? **Matt 4:2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

So far we have looked at what I call involuntary weakness - times where God strips us, deals with us and takes us into a wilderness to teach us not to trust in our own resources or to get unbelief out and trust in.

With Jesus tho we see voluntary weakness. He fasted, He sought God.

There is a place where we voluntarily turn our eyes, reliance and desire from other things in order to place them on Jesus.

This isn't an either/or situation. I'm not telling you that if we fast, seek God etc then He won't take us into the wilderness - no! Look at Paul - **2Co 11:23-30**

23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, fasting often, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Some of the things here were involuntary, others he chose. What was the point of it all tho? Why did Paul keep going in spite of things that would make most of us throw in the towel and give in?

Paul wanted to display his weakness! He was totally fine with people seeing how weak he was!

No proud arrogance or self promotion. Not boasting in his education or upbringing - yet he could have done.

When we are weak....

2Co 12:7-10

7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three

times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I know this is a familiar passage to many of us - but **the process of this can rip our guts out. No one likes being weak!** Paul prayed passionately about this over **3 specific seasons** - not just 3 times as in Thurs, Fri & Sat.

A thorn! Painful, harmful - yet he comes up out of it knowing God's grace was sufficient for him. Paul - the apostle of grace - knowing this deeper and richer than ever - God's grace is sufficient. But in order to learn that he had weakness, a thorn, suffering - a wilderness.

Yet, he came up out of the wilderness leaning harder on Jesus.

o ***Lean on Jesus***

God's purpose is for us to rely on Jesus. To lean on Him in loving trust. The verse we read at the beginning of S.O.S paints a beautiful picture of the Christian leaning upon her Lover.

Many of you know that I was unemployed for over 2 years. It was a difficult time - not just financially but for several other reasons as well as I questioned what and why God was doing what He was doing.

I remember one day when I was feeling very low and finding it hard to pray or read my Bible. As I was praying and crying out to God, He brought back to mind a Bible study I was in over 25 years ago. The pastor was doing a lengthy study on the book of Leviticus. This is the passage God brought back to mind more than 25 years later:

Lev 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins.

Illustrate meaning of lay.

That is what we are to do with Jesus - sins, burdens, cares, temptations, shame, life, everything - lean hard on Him!

- ☞ **Trust**
- ☞ **Love**
- ☞ **Intimacy**

So when people see you as an individual or a church they don't just look at you but they see that you are **coming up from the wilderness, leaning on your beloved.**