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Is the Lord a Wilderness to You?

In the first of Jehovah's messages through the tender-hearted prophet, and recorded in Jeremiah 2, there are a number of touching questions. "What is wrong in Me?" (v. 5); "Why not inquire of Me?" (v. 6); "The priests ignore Me, why?" (v. 8); "Is there any nation so whimsical as you?" (v. 11); "Why do you act as a spoiled servant?" (v. 14); "Why have you forsaken Me?" (v. 17); "Why do you hanker after Egypt?" (v. 18), etc. The whole of the message is a series of challenging and searching queries. But surely none are so pointed and full of meaning as "Have I become a wilderness unto Israel?" (v. 31). The Lord a wilderness to His redeemed ones?

Repeatedly we find in the sacred records that graphic phrase, "All that great and terrible wilderness" (Deut. 1:19), by which an attempt was made to describe the dreary places Israel had to tread in their desert journeys. A wilderness is an undesirable place where no one cares to be. Is it not tragic to find suggested here the possibility of the Desire of Nations, the Altogether Lovely One, the Chiefest among Ten Thousand, becoming unattractive and undesired? Yet such is the inference.

One of the surest and safest proofs of a growth in grace is an ever-increasing appreciation of the finished work and the glories and beauties of the Lord! Trusting in the Lord should speedily lead to "Delight thyself also in the Lord" (Ps. 37:3). What a suggestive order is to be noticed here. "Trust" then "do good"; not "do good" and then "trust." No, faith first; then works. But be sure to

"do good" after trusting. "Trust in the Lord, and feed on His faithfulness" (R.V.). That is important. As I ponder and nourish my soul on the faithfulness of God, I soon, very soon, will begin to "delight (my)self also in the Lord." That means goodbye to the wilderness view of Christ. The wilderness becomes a garden of delights.

The saddest fact of all is that He had become as a wilderness to many of His redeemed ones. Israel stood in that relationship. Not only had they in Egypt passed under the blood for safety, but through the Red Sea for deliverance. He had given them the land flowing with milk and honey for an inheritance. What more could He have done? Though punctilious in the performance of their religious duties, they had become empty formalists, missing and losing the Lord even in His own sanctuary.

Neglect is the parent of desert lives. Only too well do we know that the less we pray, the less inclined we become to pray; the less we read the Bible, the less we desire it; and the more we neglect the Holy Book and prayer, the less we desire the Lord, and the further we drift away. Neglecting the daily and devotional study of the Scriptures, and spending less and less time in private prayer, the Lord becomes as a wilderness to us---nothing but a dry, unattractive, and thirsty land where no water is.

But wilderness places can blossom again. The wilderness and the solitary place can become places of gladness, and the desert can rejoice and blossom as the rose. One stanza old Dr. Tauler wrote, and it would be well for us to offer it as a prayer to our Lord and Saviour, as follows:

As the rose amid the briars
Fresh and fair is found,
Heedless of the tangled thicket,
And the thorns around;
As the sunflower ever turning
To the mighty sun,
With the faithfulness of fealty
Following only One --

SO

MAKE ME, LORD, TO THEE!

"That in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

"That Christ may be all in all."