



Sunday, April 26th

Preacher: Pastor Howard-John Wesley

Sermon Title: 'The Clarity of the Clouds - Wandering in the Wilderness Part 2'

Scripture: Exodus 13:17-22

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place." After leaving Sukkoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Sermon Summary:

This sermon is Part 2 of a series on the examination of the signs of God's presence and guidance in the wilderness. The forty year journey of the children of Israel in the wilderness mirrors the uncertainty of the pandemic journey we find ourselves in today. Wilderness seasons bring scarce resources, difficult grief, political upheaval, and fear, but they teach us how to trust God in a way we never had before. In the midst of the wilderness we always find out that God provides clarity, direction, and guidance through clouds.

Pastor Wesley invites us to ask the question, "what are your clouds?" In other words, how do we discern God's voice, will, and direction for our lives? You don't have to be dependent on somebody else to discern God's will for your life. God's voice is always speaking and God's will is always being broadcast. The issue is we aren't always tuned and we don't have the right device. The device is a dedicated and disciplined devotional life. Pastor Wesley recommends that we incorporate these 5 components of a healthy devotional life:

- 1) Daily Scheduled Time With God - don't wait until you need God to spend time with God. If it's not scheduled it doesn't really matter to you

- 2) Dedicated Space and Place to Be with God - God's primary sanctuary should not be where you go on Sunday, it should be a place in your home
- 3) Commitment to Reading The Word of God - The Bible teaches us God's language and God's vocabulary
- 4) Committed Daily Prayer Life - Your ability to discern the will of God in your life is in direct proportion to your prayer life
- 5) An Open and Obedient Heart - God will never speak to you about something you've already determined you can't or won't do

Life Application Questions:

1. In this sermon, Pastor Wesley talked about Canaan as a place the Israelites had never been and were unsure how to get to. In this stage of your life, what are you most unsure about? What are you seeking a pillar of cloud for?
2. We were encouraged in this sermon to have daily scheduled time with God. What time of your day is hardest or the easiest for God to schedule into? What barriers have you experienced when trying to spend alone time with God and what supports have helped you honor your devotional time?
3. A common saying is "prayer changes things." Prayer not only changes "things" but has the capacity to change us. What has prayer allowed you to hear or do now that you could not do before? How have these changes influenced you and your walk?
4. Pastor Wesley stressed to us that God cannot speak to us about something we're already determined we can't or will not do. What experiences does this bring up for you? Have there been times when you've gone to God in prayer but were unwilling to be moved beyond what you wanted? What did you learn or are you learning about having an open heart?
5. Your devotional life can take a variety of forms. How do different methods of prayer (silent, read aloud, written, journaled), study (Bible apps, prayer partners, reference books/websites) and meditation (walking, running, singing) define your daily devotional practice?

Spirit Work:

1. When it comes to devotional time, Pastor Wesley stressed that having a dedicated space and place matters. If you do not already have a dedicated space and place, select one to try this week. Not only select the space, but replace the time you would spend on something you've found distracting like a tv series, social media time, or talking on the phone with devotional time. Go into this devotional space with intention and bring specific prayer requests and thanksgiving into your time.

**For an extra challenge, ask a prayer partner to do the same and share your reflections on this time at the end of the week.*

2. This week, instead of meeting friends or family members for a Zoom 'Happy Hour,' instead plan a 'Spirit Hour.' Incorporate the 5 components of a dedicated and disciplined devotional life. Review Exodus 13 and observe how God guided the Israelites. Later, allow each person on the line to praise God for how He has led them, or ask Him in prayer to guide them out of their circumstances.
3. Are there any people who model a dedicated devotional life around you? Write down what you've observed in others as goals for yourself this year and take a moment to seek their counsel on how to achieve it.