

Series: ID: King of Kings

December 6, 2015

Title: The Desert King

[Slide 1]

Text: Matthew

The Desert

The making of a Leader:

He lost his job at the ripe old age of 22. A year later he lost his bid for a seat in the state legislature. His business failed when he was 25. His sweetheart died a year later. It is reported that he had a complete nervous breakdown when he was 27. He suffered two more failed attempts at public office before being elected to Congress. 2 years later he lost the nomination to run for his seat. A year later he was turned down as Land Officer. He was then defeated in his run for the Senate not once, but twice.

His name: Abraham Lincoln.

[Slide 2]

Becoming America's greatest president didn't *just happen*. Abraham Lincoln was a man who knew what it was like to experience loss and rejection, disappointment and failure. He was a leader who had been refined in the fire. Every setback had helped prepare him for a task beyond anything he and our nation could have ever imagined. In 1861 he became president of a nation about to be plunged into 4 horrible years of civil war.

On March 4, 1865, when he was sworn in for his second term, he concluded his inaugural address with these words:

[Slide 3]

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

These are the words of a man who led his nation through the darkest times it had ever known – a wilderness in which it almost forever lost its way. But the leader had been forged in his own wilderness. He knew what it was like to lose as well as win. He had learned what it meant to live “with malice toward none, with charity for all.” Such is the making of a leader.

The King in the desert:

The story of Jesus the King begins in the desert.

His kingship was announced by a desert prophet: John the Baptist.

[Slide 4]

Matthew 3:1-4 NIV

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”*

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

This strange prophet was a man of the desert. He came calling Israel to go back to the desert to be reborn as God’s people. His baptism was a re-enactment of the crossing of the Red Sea. John warned them that their ancestry did not make them God’s children. God was about to re-create not just Israel, but the human race as “children of Abraham.” God’s long-awaited King was already present and about to take the stage. It was high time to make a path to welcome Him.

The Desert:

[Slide 5]

The desert is not a place we ever want to be. It is a place of need, where everything is lacking. It is a place where our very sense of who we are is put

in doubt. Robert Quinn speaks of this desert experience as “walking naked into the valley of uncertainty.” (Robert Quinn, Deep Change)

But the desert – that ultimate “in between space” – is where the most important things happen. This is the place where we change. And this is the place where we find God doing His greatest work.

This is the place where God births new children of Abraham. This is the place where we leave our past behind. It is in the desert that we find our King.

Jesus Himself went to the desert to be baptized by John. And as He came out of the water, the Holy Spirit rested upon Him and God spoke from Heaven:

[Slide 6]

Matthew 1:17 NIV

“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

The people of Jesus’ day would have recognized these words. They echo Psalm 8, the ancient enthronement song sung over a newly crowned king. Israel was collectively God’s child, and the king, as representative of all Israel, was thus God’s Son.

Son of God

The Desert Test:

Jesus’ first action as King was to go deep into the desert and be put to the test. Once again, He was mirroring the Exodus Story. No sooner had Israel crossed the Red Sea, than the people found themselves facing a test: the test of Need.

Looking back on those early days of hunger and thirst, Moses reminded his people:

[Slide 7]

Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

Would they continue the journey, or would they go back to the familiar comforts of Egypt? Would they trust God, or would they fend for themselves?

Moses reminds them how the LORD met their needs, teaching them through this test to put their trust in His words and commands:

[Slide 8]

Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

“If you are the Son of God...”

Now it is Jesus’ turn to face the test of neediness in the desert.

[Slide 9]

Matthew 4:1-3 NIV

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted/tested by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus has just been recognized from Heaven as Son of God. He is Israel’s long-awaited King. But what kind of King will He be? Will He take matters into His own hands, use His mighty powers and make the hunger go away? Will He be the kind of King who plays upon people’s needs by providing them with “bread and circuses” like the Roman emperors? Will He say whatever He needs to say in the moment to keep the polls up and the mob on His side?

The only way to know:

[Slide 10]

No crowds here. This is the desert. What you do in the desert defines what you will do anywhere and everywhere. The desert is the place where we find out who we are. No props, no distractions, no excuses. We are the ones who either pass or fail the test. The desert doesn't lie.

The question that the Tempter posed to Jesus He poses to you and me every day.

"Ah, so you are a son or a daughter of God? Interesting! What's in it for you? Don't you deserve better treatment than what you are getting right now? Is it fair for you to go without, when you can take matters into your own hands and fix the problem, fill the need?"

So what kind of son or daughter are you going to be? Only the desert can truly ask that question.

The Desert King

Not by bread alone!

Jesus found the answer to the Tempter's proposition in God's Word, God's Story. He didn't even attempt to argue to logic of Satan's suggestion. He didn't try to draw upon His own wisdom or experience. He turned instead to the ancient Exodus Story and Israel's Test of Need in the desert.

[Slide 11]

Matthew 4:4 NIV

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus' answer came word for word from Moses:

[Slide 12]

Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

The desert fast had exposed His neediness. It also served as His teacher: reminding Him that our Faith Journey is not defined by our needs or desires. It is defined by the God who created us and leads us into His New Life, His Kingdom.

Desert Lesson:

Abraham Lincoln was president for 4 years and one month. Virtually every minute of his presidency was consumed by war. He saw the South secede in the earliest hours of his presidency. He watched as hundreds of thousands of soldiers, both blue and grey, slaughtered each other in battles such as the world had never seen.

How sweet victory must have seemed when on April 9, 1865 the Confederacy finally surrendered and the Union was once again secure! How tempting to make some bread from stones with all of the new-found success and power! How tempting to settle scores, punish the rebels, teach them a lesson.

But Lincoln would have none of it. When asked by his generals how to treat their captives, he said, "Let `em up easy."

Lincoln, you see, had known what it was like to lose. He had spent many of those 28 years before becoming president in the desert. The desert had taught him an invaluable lesson: Remember what it feels like to be down, really down. And when you find yourself on top, put yourself in the shoes of the other party. Let `em up easy.

With malice toward none, with charity for all....do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

King Jesus would one day face a fate more horrible than anything Lincoln would ever know. With the whole world against Him, He would have to choose between the Cross and rescuing Himself from agony and death. It was a choice that was determined in the desert.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The Desert King:

[Slide 13]

Jesus is our Desert King. He promises to be right there beside us when we walk through our desert experiences. He gets our sense of need and our fear of the unknown. He embraced the title, Son of God, not as a mark of power or prestige, but as an invitation to enter into the darkest and most chaotic nooks and crannies of this crazy world. No tricks or easy miracles. He fasted until rocks looked like hot crossed buns right out of the oven!

And that means that you will never be alone in your own desert times. He is your Desert King.