



AND Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. 16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. 18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. 19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. (Gen 21:14-19)

So far as we know, God never spoke to Hagar in the company of others in Abraham's camp; or even on her journey of exile away from Abraham while on the trail to the Wilderness of Beersheba. The best time for God to communicate with us is when hope is forlorn, and provisions run out. The two men on the Road to Emmaus were despondent and never felt more alone than when they believed the Savior had been finally taken from them by the Grim Reaper of Death. But in the presence of the Lord, one is never alone! You will remember the happy fellowship of one woman left alone with only Christ: "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and JESUS WAS LEFT ALONE, and the woman standing in the midst." (John 8:7-9) Perhaps the Lonely Wilderness is the very best place to meet the Lord – not the noisy fleshpots of modern society!

There are many kinds of Wilderness areas in this world, in fact, the world itself is a vast wilderness that offers no hope for those who place their trust in the meager

offerings of the world. The world is a wilderness of deprivation, doubt, immorality and sin. Coincidentally, the first place of encampment following that by the Red Sea for the Children of Israel was a place called the Wilderness of Sin. *"And they removed from the Red sea, and encamped in the wilderness of Sin."* Num 33:11 (KJV) In this case, Sin is a proper name, however, its connotation is significant in my view. It lies just before Mount Sinai at which the Commandments of God were given defining sin.

Loneliness is often God's greatest gift if we use it to listen to the Voice of God. Consider the woman whose sins had made her so lonely that she deigned to come to Jacob's Well at a time when there would be no one present but the Lord. It was not what was expected, but what, by the grace of God, was given. Alone she heard the Voice of the Lord speaking the Words of Living Water. Emboldened by faith, she returned to the village and so convincingly shared her testimony that all believed. She was never lonely again after that encounter by the Well of Living Waters.

Perhaps the loneliest persons to encounter Christ were the lepers. They were the despised outcast of society. They were considered filthy by society, and indeed, they were just that. Their disease was deadly and incurable. Its onset was insidious, slowly devouring the bodies outward appearance by rotting away the nose, fingers, feet, ears, etc. It also slowly killed the inner body until death was finally measured out in mercy. These men and women were not allowed to mingle in public, or even private, with uninfected people. They wore distinctive rags to warn others of their identity, and were forced to shout "Unclean" at any approach of a stranger. They were separated from family, friends, and neighbors. Moreover, their rotting flesh emitted a terribly foul odor. Often these poor creatures were stoned if they tried to pass through a village. Yet, the leper is still a fellow human being as are you and I. There is an account in the Gospel of St. Mark of one such leper, though such accounts appear elsewhere as well:

*"And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, **I will; be thou clean.** And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed."* (Mark 1:40-42) We often read such accounts with unmeasured nonchalance and thereby deprive our souls of the beauty of our Lord's heart. When we fail to realize that the men of the Emmaus Road were you and I, we miss the blessing. The Woman at Jacob's Well was also us, as well as the woman taken in adultery. We all deserve the cruel death intended for that lady, but have found redemption in Christ.

We are lepers as well. We have the blood disease of sin (very much like the blood disease of leprosy) flowing through our veins. We inherited that sin disease from our father, Adam. There is no cure in this world for the sin disease; but there is a cure that is offered from that Divine Fountain of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ. Sin has made us lonely. It separates us from God and loved ones. It is insidious in onset, and it unfailingly leads to death.

Now, you, my friend, were the leper on the Galilean dirt road who came to Christ. You violated the law in approaching Christ for healing, but our Lord Jesus Christ supersedes the law of man. He does today as well. If Caesar issues laws and rulings that conflict with the Law of God, we are bound, as Christians, to obey the Higher Law and not the law of man or mammon.

He could have been stoned for coming openly to Christ and not maintaining a safe distance. But like you and me, he was desperate in his soul before coming to Christ. That is when Christ can reach us best. His electing grace will reach us regardless of the depths to which we have sunk. It may be the case that the Lord will place us in a place of desperation in drawing us to Himself. We dare not reject the calling and election of the Holy Ghost for the benefit of our eternal souls.

You came with the sores of sin covering your face in whitened, rotting tissue. Your hands were covered in blood-soaked linen of crippling sin rendering them incapable of doing any good deed. The odor of your rotting soul was foul and unpleasant; yet, out of desperation, you came and braved the severe and worldly strictures against your coming. Perhaps you came to the Throne of Grace, drawn there by the Holy Spirit, in fear and trembling. But what had you to lose – your filthy rags? So you came kneeling in plaintive and beggarly reverence before the King of Glory. “Will He receive one who is completely without worth of reception?” you may have asked yourself. You pled your case in faith, knowing that He could heal you if He was so inclined. *“If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”* How will the Lord respond to such a humble request? How has He ALWAYS responded? What would motivate our Lord to heal such a one as you or me? *“Jesus, moved with compassion.”* Ah, yes, it was compassion, facilitated by a depth of unimaginable love that moved in the heart of our Lord. Compassion always results in action, not idle sympathy.

*“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, **I will; be thou clean.**”* A human touch to the lonely and outcast can work wonders for joy; but consider the degree of joy that is invoked by the touch of our Lord. Jesus reached forth His hand and touched one who was covered with filthy sores - one whom no one else would not even get near much less touch, and the Leper (and you and me) was healed. There is no loneliness, sickness or disease in the presence of the Lord. Death, too, will faint before Him.

Now let us return to poor Hagar in the Wilderness of Beersheba (and of loneliness). Let us first consider Hagar as a young woman innocent of the illegitimacy of the child she had borne for Abraham – Ishmael. Even so, she was a mother who loved her only son. Wandering alone in the midst of the wilderness, the water bottle Abraham had given her gave out. *“ . . . and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.”* What else was there to do but weep. Her situation appeared hopeless. *“And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar?”* God loves the little children. God heard the voice of the lad and called out to Hagar with a question the answer to which the Lord was well aware. Poor Hagar was weeping bitter tears – not for herself, who was also about to perish, but more for her young son.

Just as always at the appearance of an Angel of the Lord, the Angel put Hagar at ease: *“ . . . fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.”* God always hears us wherever we find ourselves in the Wilderness of Sin – even when surrounded by a multitude of lost souls. The profuse tears of Hagar, like Mary Magdalene without the Open Tomb, blinded her so that she needed to be healed of her blindness. *“And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.”* He opens the eyes of His elect who may have been spiritually blind to see the Fountain of Living Waters in our deserts of sin. Can you see the blessings He has prepared before you?