

Grace in the wilderness

Matt Redman

"The people... found grace in the wilderness". Jeremiah 31:2 (KJV)

I love that phrase in the above passage: "Grace in the wilderness". It seems to sum up so much of our lives. Life is so often a tough journey and all of us at one time or another find ourselves in a season of pain or hardship. Even when we ourselves are not finding things tough, there is plenty of suffering all around us. Many of us will know people diagnosed with cancer, or bereaving a loved one, or desperately looking for employment – or any number of intense or painful situations. This broken world we journey in is full of many trials, and so often we find ourselves crying out to God for Him to rescue us. Sometimes he does just that – delivering us right out of the situation. At other times, in His sovereign wisdom, we're called to endure the desert. Yet in every such time, there is always grace enough for the wilderness.

My friend Eoghan Heaslip and I recently wrote a song which attempts to capture something of this journey, and express a heart of worship for God from within those desert times:

"Wanderers in this wilderness, yet we find our hope in You.
Strangers in a foreign land, yet we find our home in You..."

"We find grace in the wilderness,
Strength enough to sing of Your unfailing love.
You are close, closer than we know,
And there will come a day when all will be revealed."

Wilderness times require us to offer up songs and prayers of trust. In worship we trust both in the sovereign plans of God and His Father heart. Even when we cannot understand why we find ourselves in such an intense circumstance, deep down in our souls we know that He is high enough to see what we could never see, and that He has a Fatherly tender care for us. A burning heart of worship always recognises the unchanging worth of God over any and ever life situation – for though our present circumstances may have changed for the worst, the goodness and glory of God endure as strongly as ever.

So many of the people we encounter throughout scripture could readily have testified to God's abundant measure of 'grace in the wilderness'. Look through the bible and time after time you'll find the people of God encountering grace enough for the desert. The likes of David and Joseph both had wilderness times. Yet they found grace enough for those seasons, and came out of them stronger worshippers than ever. Joseph looked back over a season full of trials and testified, "... God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering". (Genesis 41:52). The worshipping heart of David recognised that, "weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing will come in the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

Sometimes these painful situations are not resolved this side of heaven. The Apostle Paul was a man who saw so much suffering, much of it for the name of Christ and the sake of His kingdom. Yet he encountered the God of grace in every season of the soul. His suffering included beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger, and shipwrecks. (2 Corinthians 6: 4-5. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.) Paul also endured an unidentified 'thorn in the flesh', and pleaded for it to be taken away. But God did not allow Him to be delivered of it, instead giving him the grace to endure: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12: 7-9).

John Newton's hymn, "Amazing Grace" is yet another testimony to God's grace for the wilderness. Perhaps the best know of all the hymns, this song of salvations is real about the turbulent journey of life, yet full of a deep and assured knowledge of the grace of God for this journey:

"Through many dangers, trials and snares
I have already come,
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home."

Yet another worshipper who discovered God's 'grace in the wilderness". I hope that you too will know that very same grace.