



Desert Places: When Your Desert Place Becomes a Prison

Date: Sunday 20th September

Speaker: Tony Bunker

Key Verses: Luke 7:18-23

Talk Summary:

John the Baptist had an amazing spiritual pedigree, a miraculous birth with massively significant promises over his life, he was the one to prepare the way for Jesus. He had his own very successful ministry, culminating in baptising Jesus, hearing the Father's voice affirming him and seeing the Holy Spirit descend on him. John **knew** Jesus was the Messiah. Yet after a spell in prison John started to have doubts, Jesus wasn't turning out to be quite the kind of Messiah he'd expected.

So it can be with us. Sometimes God doesn't act like we want and expect Him to, especially when we are suffering and in difficult circumstances that we wish would just come to an end. We find ourselves saying 'life just isn't meant to be like this' and feeling like God's promises to us are always 'not yet' rather than 'now'.

How we respond in these situations is so important – they are actually opportunities for our lives to be transformed if we allow it. Some thoughts on how to handle suffering well:

- Be real with God about it, honestly pray through your feelings, write a lament
- Don't minimize your suffering, avoid comparisons with others worse off
- Recognise suffering doesn't mean you have made a wrong turn or are missing God's plan
- Doubts are normal in painful times, respond by reminding yourself of times you have seen God do amazing things and known His presence
- Recognise the importance of community, don't try to carry your burden alone
- Your weakness is actually a massive opportunity to get real with God, cry out for His strength, and see how He can use you in spite of what you are going through

- Come back to the point of surrender, let go of your unanswered questions and unmet expectations and remember God is wholly good and loves you with a fierce passion. Your suffering – however long it lasts – is temporary, ask God to give you an eternal perspective.

Worship

- What are you thankful for this week?
- Where has God been at work in your life?
- When have you taken risks in faith and obedience this week?
- What has God been speaking to you about this week? (*Go around the group quickly don't spend a long time on it*)

Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)

- Have you experienced suffering resulting in a sense of God not meeting your expectations of Him? How did you deal with it?
- Why do you think some people seem to do better than others who have suffered in broadly similar ways (eg during WW2 some concentration camp inmates had much better outcomes than others)?
- Is discipleship (by which I mean seeking to follow Jesus and live a life that looks more like His) that important? What are the consequences of not going after this?

Witness

We want to be investing in authentic relationships with those who don't know Jesus yet and inviting them to anything where they might meet other Christians and Jesus.

- How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?

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