

Meat in the Wilderness

"Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." – Psalm 74:14

Summary:

The overthrow of Pharaoh shows how God can turn a defeated enemy into nourishment for his people. Israel gained both material provision and renewed gratitude, faith, hope, and joy from the victory at the Red Sea. Christians likewise journey through a wilderness and are sustained by remembering God's past deliverances—above all, Christ's triumph on the cross, deliverance from the power of darkness, and providential mercies. Even trials that once perplexed them may later foster humility, confidence, gratitude, and praise.

Outline:

1. The clarity of saving truth

Difficult details in Scripture do not obscure its plain teaching concerning Christ and salvation.

2. Pharaoh as the defeated leviathan

God shattered Pharaoh's power and made Israel's enemy a source of provision in the wilderness.

3. Deliverance as spiritual nourishment

Past victories feed gratitude, faith, hope, joy, and confidence in future need.

4. The supreme victory of the cross

Christ conquered through apparent defeat, bruising the serpent's head and turning the curse into blessing.

5. Feeding upon remembered mercies

Conversion, providence, and sanctified affliction strengthen humility, gratitude, confidence, rejoicing, and zeal.

Text

The exact creature referred to as Leviathan in the animal kingdom remains uncertain. The book of Job provides a general description, but scholars are divided, with some arguing it was a crocodile and others a whale. However, being a naturalist is not a prerequisite for being a Christian. It is comforting to believe that, despite some Scripture passages being difficult to understand, they do not undermine the core of our faith and hope.

The truths in the sacred volume are as clear as they are useful; and we have a straightforward answer to the question, 'What must I do to be saved?' Even if we do not know where heaven is, we are told exactly how to reach it. Although we remain uncertain about Leviathan, we are certain about the Consolation of Israel: "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."

Whether the animal mentioned is literal or symbolic, its name is used here to represent Pharaoh with all his schemes and might, as seen in the previous verse: "Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters." It continues: "Thou brakest the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be food for the people in the wilderness."

Who exactly were the people living in the wilderness?

First, the desert's birds and beasts feasted on the king and his army's remains. Their carcasses, left unburied onshore, were eagerly consumed by these creatures.

Second, the Jews themselves, who could be called inhabitants of the wilderness since it was their current home and they were to dwell there for forty years instead of passing through quickly. For them, Pharaoh and his army became food—both literally and morally.

Literally, as they gained resources from their enemies' spoils to support and equip themselves with clothing, weapons, and valuables like silver, gold, and jewels. Morally, these spoils became sources of gratitude, faith, hope, and joy—not just

temporarily when they praised him, but also for future hardships and challenges.

Therefore, during Isaiah's time, the Church is depicted as pleading with God, referencing this event.

"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

A people now dwell in the wilderness—Christians. To others, the world may seem like a familiar place, but to them, it's no more than a wilderness, as they are born from above and journey toward the land of promise. They recognize this not only through the hardships and trials they face but also because of their new nature and principles. Is there no leviathan whose heads have been shattered for their benefit, providing them with sustenance? Are there no past deliverances or mercies for their spirits to feed on? Reflect on the redemption through the cross: it may appear that their Lord and Saviour was defeated, yet he ultimately achieved complete victory.

He crushed the serpent's head and, through death, overcame the one who had the power of death—the devil. "Now," he declares, "the judgment of this world has taken place; now the prince of this world is driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Angels are not directly involved, but this event sparks their curiosity and fills them with admiration, love, and praise; they desire to understand these mysteries. How much comfort and joy must it bring to those who are part of this divine work!

Seeing the curse transformed into a blessing, where sin increased grace even more, and the Fall led to an improvement of their original state—it's no wonder they exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" We also observe their release from their natural condition. The Apostle states, "He hath delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."

We are encouraged to look back to our origins, to the rock from which we were carved and the pit from which we were dug. Such reflection will be immensely beneficial. What could enhance our humility, gratitude, confidence, joy, or zeal more? There are also divine interventions to recall—moments when God transformed darkness into dawn and opened a remarkable and gracious path for our escape. Those who are wise will recognize and remember these signs.

Looking back on life, he recognizes that many events which once confused and alarmed him ultimately strengthened his faith and hope in God. David could declare, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Paul's thorn in the flesh kept him humble, propelled him to prayer, and assured him of God's all-sufficient grace. Joseph must have found great joy and benefit in his hardships, which not only led to his release but also to his advancement and glory. He is capable of overcoming any leviathan and can even derive nourishment from the eater.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 9, Evening), first published in 1854.