

Today, that announcement John the Baptist gave, *"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the LORD,"* is as fresh and priceless as it was the very first time. The wilderness voice still cries out. To a lost and dying world the Good News rings forth loud and clear.

It still comes from the wilderness. Oh, it is being proclaimed in various settings all over the world; in cities, towns, villages, and country sides. But the wilderness always remains in the endless ocean of humanity. Although nearly 2000 years have passed, still a large portion of the Earth's population has not heard. When they do, and I mean hear so as to understand just who Jesus is, it is always like a cool, cold drink in a dry, parched desert.

The voice has only changed in that it comes from multitudes of believers in Christ instead of one man. We have become the forerunners now. Though some of us have been blessed with finer clothing and finer food, to this world, the message we bear is just as strange sounding as it was when it was uttered from the mouth of that wild looking preacher by the Jordan. We try to dress it up. We clothe it in garments we think will be appealing to the masses but when it comes right down to it, the simple message first proclaimed by John can never be replaced.

There is nothing wrong with using every tool we can to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself was the master at presenting His message in ways that the average person would understand. How can we be converted unless we hear? We don't really hear unless we know clearly what is being told to us. And so we should use every means morally possible to spread the Gospel. We are a voice crying in the wilderness, "Get prepared for the way of the Lord!" We can cry out in many ways, but let us cry out. The *challenge of the wilderness* is issued to every believer. It is not just the job of ministers, Sunday School teachers, and others who have dedicated their lives to service for the Master. It is the job of every born-again believer in Christ. We are all ambassadors of Him. We still announce the coming of the Messiah, not just in relating the history of His first one but the one to come. Our announcement is just as important as that of John the Baptist. Messiah is surely coming again and though John was severely persecuted, even to the point of giving his life for his message, the proclamation given to us to bring to the wilderness of mankind is just as critical, maybe even more.

John had the great privilege of introducing this Messiah at the beginning. He announced the great sacrifice He was going to make to pave the road leading out of the wilderness. Since then many other roads have tried to invade the space of the correct one. They have been disguised, made more appealing with less bumps and curves. They are easier paths and many wilderness souls have headed down their appealing, broad passages. But they lead to nowhere. They stop at pain and disappointment. They dead-end leaving the soul traveller once again in the midst of the wilderness. It is our job to direct them down the right road. It is the narrow, less appealing road that may have obstacles and bumps along the way. It will lead away from the exciting cities of life that bring more comfort to the weary traveller. But it does lead out of the wilderness of the perplexity of humankind. It does end at the feet of the long awaited Messiah who is now coming to claim those who have been redeemed by His sacrifice.

The scrapes and bruises encountered along the way will seem insignificant when compared to the reward of the journey. We must take up the call of the wilderness voice. We must plant ourselves as lonely markers showing the direction of the right road. We must stand as warning signs against taking the broader, easier way. It is our job as forerunners of Christ the King.

Is the responsibility too great? Is it too difficult and impossible to do? It may seem so. No one promised that the wilderness was an easy place to live. The wilderness is cruel and harsh to those

residing in it. There may be times when food and water is scarce. There will be days when it seems we can't take the brutal sun in its skies ever again. It is full of dangers and life-threatening creatures. The pay may seem meagre and inadequate.

But the final reward is greater than we can ever imagine. We are His voice crying out in the wilderness. We boldly tell those trapped in the wilderness that there is a way out and it is found in Christ the Lord. He brings refreshment to the parched desert. He inspires life in the deadness that haunts men's souls. We have nothing to be ashamed of because we hold the message that turns the wilderness of man's heart into a beautiful oasis. Let us cry loud