

Promised Land I
Move Out!
October 21, 2012

PRELUDE – Marvelous Light

Worship Songs – Marvelous Light / I Will Follow / Christ is Risen

Feature – “Closer to Free”

Good morning everyone. Today we begin a brand new series called *Promised Land* and I hope very much that, if you're part of NHCC, you're aware of that because this past week ...

- We sent out a very nice series card that looks like this.

- Plus, I sent out a letter explaining what's about to happen not just in this series, but to NHCC in general as our remodel project moves forward to a completion in December.

If you didn't receive any of the above, then that means we don't have your address, and right this minute, without delay, you should take that program Shannon was talking about a few minutes ago and fill out the communication card and give it to an usher on the way out so that you can be in the know.

I also posted about this new series on The City, our online communications system and even on the NHCC

FaceBook page. Yes, I am on Facebook but don't expect me to friend you! Just kidding. Well ... not really.

Anyway, if you're online but not linked up to those venues, you know what to do.

Now, in those various forms of communication, I said that what we're going to do over the next couple of months in terms of messages is to follow the story of the people of Israel as they depart from Egypt (in what we call "The Exodus") and move northward through the wilderness, across the Jordan River, and into Canaan – the land that God had promised their forefathers. And the reason we're going to do that is because there are some

amazing similarities between their experience and what God did to prepare them for *their* new reality and what we as a church are going to experience and how we need to be prepared for *our* new reality.

And make no mistake, friends, where we are headed as a church *is* a new reality. Obviously, things are different *now* – we’re meeting in this tiny room – but when we move out of this room, we’re not going back to the way it was.

You can see that very clearly just outside these doors and even more so if you stick your head in the auditorium and see the massive changes that are taking place in there. It’s open today, so make sure to stop by and take a peek!

But when I say we're not going back to the way it was, I mean more than just physically. I mean that our life together as a church is going to change and change dramatically because we *are going to grow and grow dramatically.*

Once our remodel is complete – and we expect that to happen in the second week of December – we are going to take advantage of the single greatest outreach opportunity a church can ever have: *a season of "Grand Opening"* that's going to last from Christmas Eve all the way through Easter (which, this year, is at the end of March). During those three months, we're going to do a ton of marketing and personal invitations to NHCC because, not only

will we have a great facility, we have great services, and great hospitality and great Children's and Student Ministry programs ... because we have great people and a great God and we want people to know about what's happening here.

We've done this "Grand Opening" thing twice in our history – our very first Sunday at New Mark Middle School in October of 1994 and again when we remodeled and re-opened this facility in February of 2004. Both times, from 500-1,000 new people (many of whom were not part of a church family) came to check us out over the course of three to six months, with several hundred of the folks deciding to receive and follow Jesus and to become part of the NHCC

family. And some of you here this morning are part of those experiences. We are fully expecting this to happen on an even greater scale in 2013.

And I'll say more about that later in this message but first, and more importantly, we need to talk about *why*. Why should we even attempt to grow? Why don't we just move in and enjoy the facility ourselves? Why is it so important that you and I, if we're followers of Jesus and part of NHCC, be involved in this Grand Opening effort? Why should we whole heartedly and with a good attitude embrace the changes that are sure to come – changes that growth in numbers requires?

Well, we're not going back to the way it

was, and so we need to understand why.

Their Story

To do that let's pick up the story of the Children of Israel in the land of Egypt during the time of the Pharaohs.

It had been 430 years since Jacob (who was also called Israel) and his family had arrived in Egypt as immigrants and refugees from a great famine in the Middle East. Since that point, Israel's offspring had grown to almost 2.5 million while the native Egyptian population was estimated to have been in the neighborhood of three to four million.ⁱ

I think you can see where this is going ... as the Hebrew population continued to increase, the Egyptians began to fear that they would soon be overrun. So their leaders came up with a solution: *"Let's make the descendants of Jacob – the children of Israel – our slaves before it's too late."*

And that's what they did. Generation after generation of Hebrew men and women were forced into hard labor to help the Pharaohs complete their many projects. Women and children were abused. At one point, the Pharaoh ordered that any male child born to a Hebrew woman be killed immediately in order to reduce the population growth.

And because of all this, the Book of Exodus tells us that ...

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Exodus 2:23-25 (NIV)

And that's a very important part of the story so hang on to that in your head.

Now, because God was concerned, the Bible tells us that He appeared to a very special man – a Hebrew man – by the name of Moses who, many years before, had been miraculously spared from death as an infant and, ironically, raised by the daughter of Pharaoh himself ... as the one exception to the decree.

God said to Moses ...

"I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob [and Moses would have been well aware of them and the stories of God's appearance to them, and now God is appearing to Moses] ... I also established my covenant

with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners.

"Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant." Exodus 6:2-5 (NIV)

"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.' "

"I will take you as my own

*people, and I will be your
God ... And I will bring
you to the land I swore
with uplifted hand to give
to Abraham, to Isaac and
to Jacob. I will give it to
you as a possession. I am
the Lord.” Exodus
6:6-8 (NIV)*

As to what happened next ... how it happened that the children of Israel went from slavery to freedom, well, I could *read* it to you ... or I could *tell* it to you ... but I thought it might be more interesting to *show* it to you (or, at least, an artist's conception of what happened).

So, with apologies to Queen ... I give you the "Passover Rhapsody."ⁱⁱ

<End of slide set 1 >

Video – “Passover Rhapsody”

<Begin slide set 2 >

Wasn't that better than me reading?

Anyway, you get the picture ... 2.5 million men, women and children move out at a moment's notice in the middle of the night, *encouraged to leave by all the people of Egypt including the Pharaoh ... until he changes his mind the next day but, at that point, it's too late.*

Now, the thing about this story – this event – and this would not be apparent to the casual observer, or the casual reader of scripture, is *that it is almost*

impossible to overstate its significance in Jewish thinking from that point forward right up to the present time (which is why millions of Jews around the world commemorate it each year on the night of Passover).

In fact, one theologian writes that the Exodus is *'the decisive event in Israel's history.'*ⁱⁱⁱ

I'll quote:

"Israel's life story did not really begin with the time of Abraham or even the Creation, although the Old Testament in its present form starts there.

"Rather, Israel's history had its true

beginning in a crucial historical experience that made her a self-conscious historical community—an event so decisive that earlier happenings and subsequent experiences were seen in its light.”^{iv}

In other words, the understanding of everything that happened before to Israel and everything that happened after that was filtered through this one event ... because ... this event, in the mind of the Jewish people, defined for them *who God was*; more so, even, than their understanding of God as pre-existent Creator of the world.

Again, I'll quote someone much smarter than I ...

“It is through this mighty deed (the Exodus) that Israel came to know God in His essential nature. The Hebrew understanding of God found on the pages of the Old Testament is wholly dominated by the message that Israel’s God is a God of salvation, a Savior.”^v

Because of their deliverance from Egypt, God to the Jews was not primarily a God of rules, though He does give the commandments (the Torah). He is not primarily a God of judgment, though he does bring about painful justice at times. God is primarily a God of salvation *who saves because of his compassion*. In fact, in Hebrew thinking, the central, unending proof of God's love for the Jewish people is the

Exodus event.

Remember that verse I told you to hang on to before we saw the video? It said:

*God looked on the
Israelites and was
concerned about them.*

Exodus 2:23-25 (NIV)

That's the defining statement of God's character. He heard them crying out. He felt concern and compassion. And He intervened because that's just who He is.

The Other Reason

Now, I think most of *us* (when we aren't deceived into thinking of Him as an

overbearing law-giver or unrelenting Judge) most of us tend to think of God in the same way: *a savior who saves because of love and compassion.*

I know, for me, when I first became a Christian, that's what I thought. That's the message I heard preached as a 15-year-old who had heard of God but didn't know what to do with Him on the night I "walked the aisle" in a little Baptist church and asked Jesus to save me.

The preacher said ...

*God so loved the world
that he gave his one and
only Son, that whoever
believes in him shall not
perish but have eternal*

life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17 (NIV)

And then he explained that the world deserved to be condemned – I deserved to be condemned, you deserved to be condemned – because of sin, disobedience and our neglect of God and his ways. But God because of his love intervened and made a way of salvation.

The Apostle Paul describes it like this.

Most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though

someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

Romans 5:7-8 (NLT)

Jesus came to rescue us from the power and penalty of sin because He loves us *just as we are* and *not as we should be*. And that is really, really, good news – that through trusting in Him and his death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave, we are forgiven for every sin we've ever committed or will commit, every sin we're aware of and every sin we're not.

And his salvation goes beyond mere deliverance from sin (as if you can describe something like that as "mere"). When I look at how God has stepped in at key moments of my life and given me direction I didn't have, resources I had no hope of acquiring on my own and blessings I didn't deserve, I think of those things, too, as an expression of God's love.

*The faithful love of the
Lord never ends! His
mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh
each morning.*

*Lamentations 3:22-23
(NLT)*

God saves us because he loves us and

God blesses us because he loves us. That's the perspective most of us have on our salvation. *And it's true.* We can count on it.

However, there's *another reason* God saves – another reason God intervenes in our lives that goes beyond His love for us. And because you and I live in a culture that tends to be very self-focused, it sounds a little strange to us. The *other reason* God saves and intervenes is ... well, I'll let Moses give us the answer.

It's now many years after the Exodus. The nation of Israel is finally ready to take possession of the land of Canaan (after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, which we'll talk about next

Sunday) and Moses is giving his final instructions and reminders before handing the reins of leadership over to Joshua who will lead the conquest.

At one point, God tells Moses to say this to the nation:

You are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure.

The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations!

*Rather, it was simply that
the Lord loves you ...*

That's the reason we already know. God intervened and saved the Children of Israel not because they deserved it, and not because they did anything special to earn it. For some crazy reason, He just decided to love them and save them ... *and* ...

... and ... he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

*Deuteronomy 7:6-8
(NLT)*

Moses says God saved them because,

first of all, he loved them and, second, He was keeping the oath he had sworn to their ancestors.

So, *what was that, exactly?* Well, it's been hinted at already several times in this message, but here's how God put it to Jacob in great detail about 500 years earlier.

One night, Jacob was dreaming and God appeared to him in that dream.

And God said:

"I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am

giving it to you and your descendants.

Genesis 28:13 (NLT)

Jacob at that time was actually in the land of Canaan but only temporarily. The famine was coming and his son Joseph, unbeknownst to him, was already down in Egypt preparing for them to survive it.

But in the dream, God continued:

"Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you

and your descendants.
Genesis 28:14 (NLT)

And that's the oath Moses was talking about. That's the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – whose descendants were about to enter back into Canaan, the land that had been promised to him a half-millennia before!

(And there's a little bit of a lesson in that, friends, that while it may take longer than we'd like, God's promises are always fulfilled. What He says he will do, when the time is right).

Anyway, the point is ... the *other* reason that God delivered the Jews from captivity; the other reason He was

giving them the blessing of “a land flowing with milk and honey” was that ...

He wanted to bless all the families of the earth through them.

Let me say that again.

The other reason that God delivered the Jews from captivity; the other reason He was giving them the blessing of “a land flowing with milk and honey” was that He wanted to bless all the families of the earth through them.

Now, a lot Christians, and theologians especially, when they read that immediately jump to, “Oh, that means

God wanted the Jews to produce the Messiah, Jesus, who would save everyone from their sins. And that's how they would bless all the families of the earth – by providing the savior.”

And there's truth in that, but I don't think that's how the Jews who were leaving Egypt that day would have thought of it.

What was clear to them – to Moses, especially – was that they would bless the world by modeling what it meant to be a people who had a personal relationship with God. He would love them and they would love Him.

And their love would be expressed by keeping the Torah (the Law, the commandments, that would be given to

Moses on Mt. Sinai); and God's love would be expressed by continuing to bless and protect them.

And, as the rest of the world looked on, they would get to see what it was like to be in a relationship with the God of the Universe ... and that would be a blessing because then those people would see that *they, too, could have that kind of relationship with God!*

See, God had a plan to redeem the world and the people of Israel were invited to be his partners.

To put it another way, God's salvation was intended to help *them* out but it was also intended as a way for them to help *Him* out.

And this, I think, is where a lot of us get confused about our relationship with God. Because our self-focused culture tells us over and over that it really *is* all about us, we think of “salvation” as being all about us. We see it as Jesus coming into our lives to save us from sin or whatever problem or issues we are facing. And that’s true. He does.

But there’s more to it – much more – because in salvation, not only does Christ enter into our lives, *we enter into His*. Not only does God come in to do something for us, we get to get into God’s life and do something for Him.

That’s what God was doing in the People of Israel. He was saying, “I’m coming into your situation (I’m going to

deliver you from Pharaoh), but I'm also drawing you into My situation because I have a plan."

And that's what He wants to do with us – with you and me.

The Apostle Peter described it like this:

As you come to him [Jesus], the living Stone ... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5 (NIV)

It's interesting – in other parts of the OT

(we didn't have time to look at them)
God uses that same exact language about the Israelites, that they were to be to him a "kingdom of priests." So, Peter is saying, "When you come to Jesus as your savior, he not only saves you because he loves you, he is also molding you into something he can use – a priest!"

And what is a priest supposed to do? They're supposed to represent God to people ...

... which is why Peter continues:

*You are a chosen people,
a royal priesthood, a holy
nation, God's special
possession, so that you
may declare the praises*

*of him who called you out
of darkness into his
wonderful light.*

And as His chosen people – people who have been saved because of His great love – God then wants us to declare his praises to the world around us so they, too, will want to know Him.

“Wait a minute, Rick, I’m a little confused here. I thought *the Jews* were the chosen people and God’s special possession but now it sounds like you are saying we are!”

Well, we are, and they are too – still in some ways – but that description now also applies more to people who come to Christ as savior ...

... which is again, why Peter says ...

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

In other words, what God wanted to do through the Children of Israel, God now wants to do through the spiritual sons and daughters of Jesus.

God wants you and me to favorably represent Him to the world around us; to model what it means to be in a relationship with him; to love Him and be loved by Him. He wants to help us

out – for sure – but He also wants us to help Him out.

Our Plan

And that can happen in many ways on an individual level. We can model what it means to love God by ...

- Just being kind to people, especially in this election season. So many people are rude and inconsiderate!
- Helping friends and family who have financial needs.
- Honoring your parents.
- Living with integrity and commitment.
- Putting God and his Kingdom first

in your priorities.

- Returning good for evil instead of evil for evil, which is the way of this world.
- Avoiding gossip and slander.
- Not being driven by consumerism and the desire for more.
- Enjoying your relationship with God and then simply telling someone else about it when it is appropriate.
- Inviting someone to come and see what you've found in Christ.

By the way, most of those ideas are from the Torah – the 10 Commandments – or Jesus' explanation or expansion of those.

But the calling, and this is the point I want to leave you with, is not that we do that *alone*; to remain, to use Peter's analogy, as just a "singular spiritual stone." Peter says we are each individual stones being built into a spiritual house. We are to be part of "a people" and part of "a holy nation" that is declaring the praises of God ... and make no mistake about this, this is what it meant to the biblical writers. Peter is talking about the church and God's intention for the church ...

... which, finally, at last, brings us back to the "why" questions I raised at the very beginning of this message: why should NHCC even attempt to grow?

1. Why should we do this Grand

Opening in hopes of seeing at least 800 people, who have never visited North Heartland before, come and experience one of our services from Christmas thru Easter?

2. Why should we do the things that are necessary behind the scenes that are going to take all hands on deck in order to retain some of those folks so that, within a year, at least 200 more people on average are showing up here every Sunday morning? (That's about a 30% growth rate, by the way).
3. Why do we hope to see at least 50 people baptized next year? (For those of you who are new to us, around here baptism is important

to us because it's the way that people declare their faith in Christ).

Why is it so important that you and I, if we're followers of Jesus and part of NHCC, be whole heartedly committed and involved in this Grand Opening effort? Why should we give to support it? Why should we serve to see it become a reality? Why should we pray and invite people to come and be a part of this grand opening? Why should we embrace the changes that are sure to come – changes that growth in numbers requires?

The answer to all of those questions is that church *is not about you. It's not about me.*

Well, at least, not completely. It *is* about you and about me in the sense that God wants to use our experience in this congregation – through the messages, through the worship services, through the programs, through the small groups, through our Crisis Care ministry, even in these Accelerate “Halfway There” events – God wants to use all of that to help us in whatever ways we need to be helped just because He loves us.

But God also wants us to help Him because there’s a world of people right outside these doors who do not have a loving relationship with God, who have no idea what it means that God loves them just the way they are. They don’t have any clue. We do. We know what

it's like to have that kind of relationship ... and this church, therefore, is about those people, as well. God has put us here, friends, as the family of NHCC, so that all the families of this community can be blessed, so that we can model for them what it means to have a relationship with God – what it is to love God and to be loved by Him.

And bottom line, that's why we're doing what we're doing both in the remodel and in the Grand Opening. All the stuff that's going to happen – that's why.

And, in the days ahead, we'll need to remember that because, as Israel discovered, when God calls you to do something, it's not always roses. But that's next week's topic!

Let's pray together.

God, thank you so much for the example that is ours in the scripture and that you have from the days of Israel, from the beginning of their history, you've modeled what it is that you want us to do, what you want us to be. You want to come as our rescuer and savior and you've done that in Jesus. Many of us in this room can point to, again and again, the ways you've delivered us and the ways you've blessed us because you love us.

But, God, sometimes we forget the second part of that, that not only are you coming to help us, but you

want us to participate in what you're doing. You are calling us into your life. So, God, I pray that as a church, as individuals first of all, we'll begin to see our lives that way, that you're not blessing us just because we're some kind of special people, but you want us to be a model, an example. God, give us courage however we need to do that. If it's the things we just talked about - if it's words, give us courage to do that. If it's no words, give us courage to do that. God, beyond that, as a church, help us to have a vision that this is not primarily about us. Yes, we are blessed. Yes, we are fed and yes, we grow. But, there's a world that you've put us here for. Give us that

desire, that vision, that hunger as we go through these next days and we thank you so much for allowing us to be part of this. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Feature – Banner of Love

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Accelerate “Halfway There” meetings
2. Service times will be changing on Sunday Nov 4th
 - Need better load balance of volunteers between 2nd and 3rd services
 - 12:30 service time end is tough

for babies and toddlers with
naps and lunch

Time change slide

- The new times are 8:15 / 9:30 / 11:00.
- Nursery/toddler room only @8:15
- Full Adventureland runs @9:30 & 11:00
- Student ministry runs @11:00
- Nov 4th is also the date of the time change back to CST.

THIRD SVC ...

need help moving chairs, 5 mins,
meet at restrooms in commons.

Endnotes

ⁱ See <http://www.keyway.ca/htm2001/20010121.htm> for how this could have happened in 400 or so years.

ⁱⁱ See http://www.aish.com/h/pes/mm/Passover_Rhapsody.html?s=mpw

ⁱⁱⁱ N. W. Porteous, *The Theology of the Old Testament in Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (New Edition), p. 152. Cf. Foulkes, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

^{iv} B. W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, p. 5.

^v G.A.F. Knight, *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 45f.