

Promised Land I
Positive ID
November 4, 2012

PRELUDE – Blessed Be Your Name
Worship Songs – Alleluia / We Are
Feature – Shine (Collective Soul)
Drama – “By the Book”

Good morning everyone!

As Irving said, today we’re going to look at why God gave the Israelites the 10 Commandments (and the rest of the Mosaic Law as well). We’re going to look at what He was trying to accomplish in that “revelation from Heaven” and then try and apply that to our lives, both as individuals and as a church.

Of course, a lot of people would say, "Well, it's kind of obvious isn't it? Human beings need rules ... so God gave rules."

And, there is a lot of truth to that. Human beings *do* need rules and limits – some of us more than others. But if we believe that's *all* God was doing in giving the law, then it's easy for us to obsess and go to extremes – kind of like what we saw illustrated in the drama. I mean, if we believe God's law is only given so we'll keep it between the lines and avoid messing up, it becomes very easy to narrow those lines to the point where we just become ... *weird*. And this can happen not only to individuals but with groups of people as well; to

churches and even entire denominations.

That's why it's important to understand the context in which God gave Israel the 10 Commandments and the rest of the Law. That revelation didn't come to them in a vacuum. It came to them (through Moses) at a most significant point in their history: during their journey from captivity in Egypt to Canaan – the Promised Land ... which is what we've been talking about over the past couple of weeks.

And the reason why we've been talking about that is that we, too, as a congregation, are on a journey. Right now, I think it's pretty obvious that we're in "the wilderness" in terms of our

facility: we can't use the commons or the main hallway; we're crammed into this little room instead of the auditorium. But soon we'll be moving out of here and into a new reality that's very different from anything we've ever had before ... *and not just physically*. In six short weeks, the remodel will be complete and right after that, from Christmas Eve through Easter Sunday, we're going to do a huge season of Grand Opening. Thousands of our neighbors, family, friends and co-workers are going to be invited to come and experience what we have and what we are together as a church.

And our church is going to grow as a result of that. We're going to reach more people for Jesus and they're

going to become part of our family. And, as I said last week, these next three months will be one of the greatest experiences of your life as a follower of Jesus. And later in this message, I'll tell you what you need to do in order for that to happen for you.

Now, what we're trying to do in this series is to learn from the experience of Israel as God prepared *them* for *their* new reality and then apply some of those lessons to *us* as we're about to enter into *our* new reality.

And we've learned two big lessons so far (and these will give us context that will help us answer the question of why God gave Israel the law).

Lesson from week 1: God saved Israel not only for their good but also for the good of the whole world.

When God miraculously intervened to lead them out of Egypt (with the Pharaoh begging them to leave after 400 years of slavery and oppression), He did so, the Bible says, simply because He loved them. He heard their cries and had compassion on their suffering, He said, "I'm going to deliver you" ... but there was more to it, another reason God wanted them to become a people and a nation that would model for other people and nations what it meant to love and be loved by the One True God. Basically, God wanted Israel to be blessed in order to become a blessing.

The application we made to us as individuals and a church is that God does the same thing today. God saves us and blesses us not only because He loves us and has compassion on us, but also because he wants for us to model for others what it is to know God, to walk with God, to love God. We're blessed so that we can turn around and be a blessing to others.

And this is why what we're doing in this remodel and Grand Opening matters. It's not enough for us to say, "Oh, what a wonderful church we have. God is working in my life through NHCC. I am so blessed." God wants more than that. God wants NHCC (and every other church for that matter), to be a lighthouse to our community so that

others can be blessed like we are.

Second lesson (from last week): It's very easy to fall away and miss out on the Promised Land if you do not stay focused on God and the vision.

The Bible tells us that this is what happened to everyone older than 18 when Israel left Egypt – which is amazing given how they started out in such a miraculous way. But in two short years every single one of them (adults, that is) allowed some form of difficulty, or doubt, or discontentment or distraction to pull them off the path to which God had called them and they missed out on the blessing that had been promised to them.

And the application we made to us is

that we started out on our journey a year ago when we began our two-year *Accelerate* campaign (which not only is funding the remodel but also our existing ministry and a new church plant sometime in 2013). Many of us made pledges to give generously and sacrificially with such excitement and commitment but, since then ...

- Some of us have experienced financial or personal difficulties.
- Some of us have doubts about what we're doing as a church – worried that whatever happens isn't going to be as good as it used to be.
- Some of us are discontented at home, at work, with the church,

and now even with God

- Some of us have gotten distracted - interested in something else other than what God wants to do through us personally and as part of NHCC.

And just like the Israelites, some of us have given up or we've moved back on the commitment we made. And the point I made last week was unless we start fighting back against those things that are trying to pull us away, we're going to miss out on the blessing that could be ours by finishing well.

God Gives “The Law”

Now, those are the two big lessons

we've seen so far in this story. And at the end of last week, we left the Israelites at a point of total shock and sadness having just received the bad news of judgment: because of their lack of faith and trust in God in sending them into the Promised Land, for the next 38 years, they're going to have to wander in the desert – until everyone older than 18 at the time of the Exodus had died. And that's exactly what happened.

Now, next Sunday we're going to pick up the story at that point – 38 years later – where the wandering has finally ended and that younger generation has grown up and they're finally ready to enter the Promised Land. But today, we're going to rewind just a bit and look

at the story of God giving them the Law (which includes the 10 Commandments). *That* event had happened almost a year earlier as the nation of Israel was camped around Mt. Sinai.

Now, most of us are familiar with the idea of Moses (Charlton Heston) going up on the mountain and receiving the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written

...

... but, in reality, the Bible says that God actually gives the Ten Commandments not once but *three times*.

The first time (recorded in Exodus 20), God speaks to them audibly from the

mountain and everyone hears – all 2 to 3 million men, women and children. But it's terrifying – there's an earthquake and fire and a cloud – and so they run in fear! And as they are running away they tell Moses, "You listen to God for us and tell us what He said. We'll be back when this is all over" ...

... which leads to the second time: God calls Moses to the base of the mountain and gives him a bunch of miscellaneous laws about how the people are to manage their lives in the Promised Land. So, God addresses things like ...

- how to handle property disputes,
- what happens if someone is

accidentally killed by someone else

- how to treat and care for widows and orphans and the less fortunate in their community
- the need for people to tithe
- religious holidays to observe, etc.

Then God calls him up the mountain and gives them instructions about building the tabernacle, appointing priests and leading worship. After all that, Exodus 24 tells us that God personally inscribes the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets (which, again, is the second time He's given them).

Unfortunately, when Moses goes back

down the mountain, he discovers the Israelites are now worshipping a golden calf. They've gotten distracted. In anger, he throws down the tablets and they break. So God calls Moses to come up on the mountain again and gives even more instructions about specific behaviors for life in the new land; then, according to Exodus 34, He inscribes two more tablets with the Ten Commandments ... which now is the *third time* they are given.

Are you following this? Obviously, this is a pretty big deal. God must really have wanted them to get this list. It must have been really important and life-changing. And it was. In fact, that list of 10 Commandments eventually became the basis for morality in all of Western

civilization. At one point, it had great influence in the laws and regulations of many countries to say nothing of its influence on individual behavior.

A couple of years ago, however, a survey discovered that twice as many people could name the seven ingredients of the Big Mac than could name all 10 of the commandments.ⁱ *Times have changed.*

So, before we go any further in this discussion, I thought it would be a good idea for us to review the list for ourselves. And I debated whether or not I should just summarize it for you ... or read it to you out of the Bible ... but I thought it might be more interesting to show you another of those little videos I

keep finding.ⁱⁱ

So, with apologies to Charlton Heston
... here are the Ten Commandments.

<End slide set 1 >

Video – The Ten Commandments (2.5)

<begin slide set 2 >

Well, there you go – the Ten
Commandments. Were you reminded
of anything you had forgotten when you
saw the list?

Now, even though that list is not as
familiar as it once was (and still should
be), it's what most people think of when
they think of "God giving Israel the
Law." But, as I alluded to earlier, God
gave Moses more than just these 10. In

fact, altogether, there were 613 laws that Moses wrote down between his various trips up and down and around Mt. Sinai.

Reasons Why

... which brings us to the question I raised at the beginning of this message: *why?* Why did God give the Law – the Big 10 and then the other 603 lesser laws – to Israel? What was His purpose?

As I said, part of the purpose was simply to reveal what God said was “right” and what God said was “wrong.” But there were other purposes as well.

For example, according to the Apostle Paul ...

Its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. Romans 3:19-20 (NLT)

And that's very true.

A simple example: have you ever noticed how, when people get mad or upset, they want to say "God bless it" (of course, we never do that, right?) but

they don't say "bless." Why do we feel that urge to use "God" in that way? I mean, why don't they say, "KC Chiefs bless it." Why do we pick God? Because we're sinners and the third commandment serves to reveal it.

Of course, Paul also goes on to say that the law doesn't show us how sinful we are just to scare us or make us feel bad. The purpose of revealing our sinfulness is to confirm that we really do need the savior that God provided in Jesus.

"The law shows us how sinful we are," Paul writes.

And then he says ...

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law ... We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. Romans 3:21-22 (NLT)

But there's another purpose in God giving the Law to Israel and we see it when we look at the event in context of what was happening at the time – the journey from Egypt to Canaan – where Israel was to become that model nation and a blessing to the rest of the world.

The Bible tells us that on one occasion,

Moses gathered the people together to remind them of the whole Law and he began by saying ...

I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.

*Deuteronomy 4:6
(NIV)*

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."

Deuteronomy 4:6
(NIV)

And they'd be right to say that, Moses continues.

For what other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:7-8
(NIV)

So not only did God give these laws to Israel for the purpose of defining basic right and wrong, and not only for

helping us see that we're not perfect and that we truly do need a savior, God gave these laws so that *other nations* would see the purity and wisdom of Israel, and would say:

"Wow – where did you all get those ideas about God and how to worship God? Where did you get those ideas about how to treat one another? How to order your lives in this way?"

Oh, you got them from the One True God? You mean, not an idol made of stone or wood but *a real Person who spoke* and led you in this way? Can we talk to that God, too? Could He be our God, too?"

God gave the law – especially the 10 commandments – to Israel so that the rest of the world could be blessed by it. And, as I said earlier, that’s what’s happened throughout history.

But there’s one more reason why God gave the law to Israel. And this one’s a lot less dramatic and less far-reaching than the other reasons - it’s much more localized and specific to the people of Israel in that particular day and age - but it’s just as important.

Let me give you a hint as to what it is by reading several of those “other” lesser laws Moses gave.

Here’s a fun one:

*Do not cook a young goat
in its mother's milk ... Do
not muzzle an ox while it
is treading out the grain.
Deuteronomy 14:21,
25:4 (NIV)*

Interesting ... not what I would call life-changing instruction from the scripture. But, interesting.

This one might be a bit easier to relate to:

*When you beat the olives
from your trees, do not go
over the branches a
second time. Leave what
remains for the foreigner,
the fatherless and the
widow. When you harvest
the grapes in your
vineyard, do not go over*

the vines again.

*Leave what remains for
the foreigner, the
fatherless and the widow.
Remember that you were
slaves in Egypt. That is
why I command you to do
this.*

*Deuteronomy 24:20-
22 (NIV)*

What's Moses saying? He's saying
"when we get to the Promised Land,
we're going to treat people the way we
wish we had been treated in Egypt."

**Ok, one more (and I'll get to the
point).**

*You are the children of the
Lord your God. Do not cut
yourselves or shave the*

front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession. Deuteronomy 14:1-2 (NIV)

Now, let's look very closely at this passage. The law about how to react when someone dies is in the second sentence. Notice that it's sandwiched between two other thoughts which remind the people who they are; that they are different from everyone else; that they're not supposed to act like everyone else for one reason – *because they belong to God.*

So, in this we see that another purpose of the law is to lay out certain “expected attitudes and behaviors” which serve to make Israel unique and define who they are as God’s people.

It’s kind of like Moses was saying, “We treat animals differently ... we treat foreigners, orphans, widows and refugees differently ... we don’t grieve as other peoples of the earth grieve ... because *we’re Israel* and we belong to God.”

By the way, when you understand this purpose of the law, it becomes obvious that some of the stranger parts of the law (like not cooking a young goat in its mother’s milk), were never intended to apply to us today. Those parts were

specifically meant to define *Israel's* "expected attitudes and behaviors" – not *ours*. They were meant to make them unique in their world, in comparison to other nations around them, most of whom were extremely barbaric, immoral and worshipping idols instead of the One True God.

What About Us?

Now, as I was thinking about this story several months ago and, specifically, this particular observation about why God gave Israel the Law, I began to wonder – "what kinds of attitudes and behaviors serve to make us unique as God's people in our world?"

Obviously, that question can be answered on a personal level: *what about the way I live makes me unique in this world as a follower of Jesus?* And I mean unique in a winsome way, not a weird way! A way that attracts others to God instead of what we saw implied in the drama.

- Is there something engaging about how I perceive and treat others, especially “my enemies” ...
- Something appealing about how I approach trials and tribulations that come to me in my life ...
- Something attractive in how I am generous with my money and possessions ...
- Something winsome in how I

respond under pressure ...

Are there specific attitudes and behaviors that come from knowing and following Jesus that make others think, "Wow, that's kind of different. I wonder what's driving that in him or her?"

Now, the truth is, none of us who follow Jesus will ever be perfect in this life, and as I made this list I thought, man, I've failed at so many of these things, but there ought to be some areas of our lives where those kinds of things are happening.

That's why Jesus said ...

You are the light of the world. A town built on a

hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV)*

And I think it's a good exercise to ponder this issue, personally, from time to time. How is this coming out in my life?

But there's another level at which this

question can be considered. It can be considered at “the church level.” I mean, since we’re trying to apply lessons that *Israel* learned to *our* situation as we’re about to enter into a new reality, we could ask “what about North Heartland makes us unique? What are *our* expected attitudes and behaviors as a church?”

These would be good things to know as we move into the next phase of life together. For one thing, if we’re aware of what makes us unique (again, in a winsome sort of way), it becomes a little bit easier and more motivating to invite people to come check us out. And if we know what our expected attitudes and behaviors are, then we have a really good chance of maintaining and

increasing those things that make us winsome.

And at this point I need to say that this is *exactly* what we talk about in the Church 101 class which I will be teaching next Sunday afternoon. And I want to strongly encourage you that if you've never been to it or it's been a really long time, it would be well worth it for you to sign up and be part of it. I guarantee that it will be a lot more interesting and uplifting than watching the Chiefs.

However, since I have a few more minutes and there's not enough space for all of you in the class, I thought I would give just a brief list of some of the things I hear people say that stand out

about NHCC not necessarily in comparison to other churches but in comparison to what people tend to expect from "church" in general.

What Makes NHCC Unique

(These are not arranged in any particular order of importance).

1. We try to help believers reach seekers.

- We try to help people, who are already convinced about Jesus being their Lord and savior, to connect with people in their lives who are not church folks, who don't know Jesus, who are questioning whether or not there is a God.
- What we're trying to do as a

church – and this was like the number one motivation for starting NHCC in the early 90s – we’re trying to say, “look, you don’t have to do this on your own. We’re all going to work together and building something together so that we can bring friends, family and neighbors who can come and hear something about Jesus and what he wants to do in their lives.

So, we’re actually kind of set up that way, and that is kind of a unique thing about us.

Another unique thing, and people say this to me all the time, and I hear people saying it to other people:

2. We have developed an appropriately transparent and vulnerable style of self-disclosure.

- In other words, we know we're not perfect and we're not afraid to say that. We're not afraid to say it from the front. We're not afraid to say it in small groups. It's okay to be a struggler; it's okay to have doubts. It's just where we are. It's okay to let that be known in appropriate settings and in appropriate ways.

Another thing that is kind of unique about us (and I've seen this and I've experienced this):

3. We provide amazing hospitality in this church.

- the way we greet people when they come in; the way we're set up in our commons; the way we do funeral ministry
- What's cool is that our remodel was designed with this in mind!

4. We try to take a holistic approach to “doing ministry” (the “three Ps”)

- Whether it's children's ministry or student ministry or the band, we recognize that anything that happens around here requires 3 parts: the production (you've got to make something happen), the people (whatever you're doing, you have to be growing people; God wants to use the experience to grow people), the process (how we

are working together - loving each other, getting along, reconciling differences – the process matters)

Now, you might put other things on this list but these are some of the things I thought of ... and *for which* I am thankful and *about which*, quite honestly, I am often surprised. When we started NHCC in 1994, I would have never guessed that any but the first on that list would have become unique and winsome characteristics of this congregation, but they have.

God has grown these qualities in all of us – in me and our other leaders and in you – and they will serve us well in our new reality.

Expected attitudes and behaviors

So, what are our expected attitudes and behaviors?

Again, we talk about this in great detail in Church 101 but I want to mention just two very briefly because we hear about these things all the time. People either love these two expectations that we have or they hate them. They either embrace them (at some level) or they move on.

1. We expect people who are part of NHCC to face the hard stuff instead of ignoring it.

Not only are we not into pretending that everything is OK when it isn't ("Praise God, even though I'm miserable and

dying"). We don't pretend like that. Not only that, we also believe that if you have crap in your life (and I use that word intentionally) – if your finances are messed up, if your thinking is messed up, if your emotions are messed up, if your relationships are messed up – you're going to be pushed, prodded, poked and nagged until you do something about it. And I love that about this place!

And that pressure will sometimes come from me in teaching, or it will come personally from the people who get to know you over time, like people in your small group. That's the only way we grow, plus it continually forces us to turn to Christ because you realize, "man, I've got a problem here; I do

need a savior.”

But some people don't like that and they decide to move on. And that's OK because this is the engine behind a lot of what makes us unique, so I don't think this is going to change.

2. The other expectation is that people at NHCC will at some point make a move from consumer to contributor.

Unless there is some serious barrier that prevents it, we expect that everyone will begin to take some level of responsibility for what happens here at NHCC. We don't try to manipulate with guilt, but we have no shame about constantly saying “if you're not serving and giving in some way, you need to

be.”

That’s not only part of what makes NHCC “happen” it’s also a key ingredient to our own spiritual growth.

And since I’m talking about this, I want to let you know that in the month of December, we’re going to ask every person who calls NHCC “home” to answer three questions that definitely move us from consumer to contributor.

1. What will I give in 2013? (we took a huge leap of faith financially based on pledges)
 - α. Will ask people who are not giving to consider making a pledge of 5% of their gross

income over the next year. So, if you're not giving anything now and you're making \$10,000/year, you would pledge \$500.00 over the next year.

b. Will ask people who have made a commitment to Accelerate to re-affirm that in some way. Some of us may say, "hey, I'm good," some of us may say, "I need to raise that," and some may say, "I overshot." We just want everyone, before we go into our Grand Opening, to say, "God, what do you want me to do financially?"

We also want every person to answer

this question:

2. Where will I serve here at NHCC from January through June?

a. Because of sheer numbers, we'll take all hands on deck every Sunday morning. It's going to be a bigger operation than anything we've ever had.

b. We'll be talking about that and helping people discern, "where am I supposed to be? What could I be doing?"

3. If God opens the door who will I invite at some point during the Grand Opening Season? Who is on my heart? Who does God want me to invite? Take a chance and invite that person.

α. We're going to dedicate our facility with those names. We're going to take all those names and we're going to write them on the floor (under the carpet).

I said earlier that this could be the greatest time of your spiritual life – and this is how. These three questions will lead you there.

Conclusion

Anyway, those are two of the more prominent expectations we have.

Now, again, just to be clear, in giving

you those lists, I'm not trying to say "look how much better we are than other churches" because we're not. I could make a list of things we're not good at (collectively) that's twice as long. My point in all of this is simply to say "this is who we are, this is what makes us distinctive. Let's celebrate it. Let's maximize it. And let's see what God will do with it and through it.

Let's pray.

God, thank you for this example of what you did with the nation of Israel and how you gave them this incredible law, the 10 Commandments especially, and the effect they have had on the world and even the effect on us today.

Thank you that the law was for more than that - it was for making them unique and different and special in the world. And you want the same thing for us. Thanks for making us unique as individuals. You've given us all these unique ways to shine the light of Christ in our lives. And, you've given us as a church unique ways that are special and amazing that you will use to bless this world. God, I pray you would help us to maximize this and help all of us to take responsibility to walk in ways that maintain this uniqueness, and that you would use us because we're all in this together. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Feature – We're All in This Together (HSM)

Endnotes

ⁱ See <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/10/12/us-bible-commandments-idUSN1223894020071012>

ⁱⁱ See <http://www.g-dcast.com/shavuot>