

**“Given the World”
Genesis 12: 1-9**

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**November 2, 2014
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I recently watched part of the movie *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island*. It features “The Rock,” Dwayne Johnson. If you are interested all in quality films, do not watch this movie. It’s terrible.

But there is one interesting part in it. The main characters are trying to find the mysterious Island, hinted at by Jules Verne in his novels. And they have found the location and they are in a helicopter but, in the place that the Island is supposed to be, there is only a huge storm. As they fly this helicopter closer and closer to the eye of the storm, they realize that they aren’t going to be able to get away. But it’s also at this time that one of the characters, a teenage boy, realized that in order to find the island, they are going to have to go INTO the storm. Every impulse is to flee and find protection and run away but, in order to get where they are going, they actually have to fly into the storm.

If you aren’t a Christian and you’re here this morning, you may be thinking this: Here I am, living in a world that is obviously in need of good things. When I look outside, I see in many ways a storm. And this world needs some good stuff in the midst of that storm. Beauty. Connectivity. Mercy. Justice. Peace. I want my neighbors to matter to me and I want my neighborhood and my city to matter to me and I want to see it flourish. And I value beauty and expression and community. Art. Music. Nature.

But I look around and it looks like Christians don’t value any of this. They value megachurches that look like Best Buy, gas-guzzling SUVs, and insulated lives that seem like they are bent mostly toward increasing their own little kingdom in the world and maybe some safety for their kids from all the bad folks who value the stuff I value. They’ve turned their helicopters away from the world and they’re going to do their own thing.

You may be thinking that. Well guess what, Christians, lots of people think that. Your neighbors probably think that. Do you know why people think that? Well, it's because in many ways, they're right. Christians can be guilty of these things. Of building insulated lives intent on making our own kingdoms bigger. Of looking at the world and deciding that rather than move into it, they are going to move away.

And I don't say that lightly. I say it as one who is right there with you. I struggle with the same stuff. Because it is a struggle. It's hard to live as a Christian in a world that seems like it is against you.

So how do you do it? How are Christians supposed to function in a world that seems against them? In a world where what you value seems to be under constant attack. Well, the answer is actually just the opposite of what we are often tempted toward. We are tempted to turn in to ourselves and build a little walled kingdom for ourselves so we might feel safe. But that's not what the Bible calls us to do. What the Bible says is that Christians are called to MOVE INTO the world in order to CLAIM IT FOR the Kingdom of God

We are going to look this morning at Abraham, who was called to manifest the Kingdom of God in Canaan, not for his own benefit but for the blessing of the world. He was called to move into this pagan land in order to claim it for the Kingdom of God. He was called to reveal the beauty of the Lord to the world around and to claim that world as God's Kingdom. I hope we are going to see that our calling is the same.

Look with me at chapter 12, verse 1 as we dig in to God's plans for Abraham and for His people. "Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Now, let's just admit here that God is asking a lot. He tells Abraham, "Go." And then he rolls out just what the going means. Go *from your country*. If Abraham is living in Ur at this time, he's living in a pretty prominent place. A flourishing place. A good place to live. More importantly, it's his place. It's his culture. It's the way of life he's been living in for 75 years. That's a long time to get used to your place. He's being asked to adapt to a different culture. To

move to a different land with different customs and different people. That's hard to do. It took me a year to change my license plates because, in many ways, it was an act of leaving. Texas was and still is a part of my identity and it's hard to change that. South Louisiana has a very strong cultural identity. The kind of thing that would be hard to leave, especially after an entire life lived there.

But there's more. God also says *Go from your kindred*. It's the land of his forefathers. The place his family has been for generations. This is the place that his family is from. People in Louisiana get this. I can't tell you how many times I have heard the story... "I grew up here and I went away for a few years, but it just kind of drew me back." It's home. This is a world with no planes, trains or automobiles. So leaving is really leaving. He's not only being asked to adapt to a different culture, he's being asked to leave the people he feels most at home with.

And then there's this. *Go from your father's house*. From the place of protection, the place of security. It seems from this passage like Abraham is the heir. He will inherit the stuff if he stays. His father's house is his house. His father's livelihood is his livelihood. He's being asked to leave the familiarity and protection of home. One commentator says, "to leave home and break ancestral bonds was to expect of ancient men almost the impossible."

And where's he going to? Not sure. He hasn't been told. Oh, and by the way, we've already been told that Sarah is barren. No kids to carry on his name in whatever foreign place he's being taken to.

Leave it all, go into what you aren't sure of, and do so without the security you would like to have. **That's a lot of exposure.** God is asking a lot of Abraham and he asks a lot of Christians. Christians are called to move into the world and claim it for God's Kingdom. Moving into the world takes risk and faith. It takes exposure in difficult ways.

I know many of you have felt this kind of exposure. It's unsettling, isn't it?

Of course, the passage doesn't end there, thankfully. The request is big, but take a look at the size of the promise that God gives here. He actually gives Abraham not one but 7 promises!

1. I will make you a great nation
2. I will bless you
3. I will make your name great
4. You will be a blessing
5. I will bless those who bless you
6. I will curse those who disdain you
7. Through you all the families on earth will be blessed

Seven blessings. That's a lot. You would feel overwhelmed with that. If someone came and said, here are seven really great things I'm about to do for you, you would feel really great, because seven is a lot. But 7 means even more in the ancient world, both to Abraham and to God's people to whom this was first written. When the number seven is listed, it brings the connotation of Divinity. The number itself rings with the promise of GOD!

The creator of all things. The one who has made everything is the one promising to make you a great nation. The one who created the world is the one calling you to move into it.

And 5 times the word *blessing* is used. The message is clear. God is asking a lot, but he is giving so much more. Moving into the world takes risk but we are not alone. Moving outside your comfort zone means exposure, but you aren't alone. You aren't just dangling by yourself, you are called to move into the world with the backing of the great promise that God is at work in the world!

It's the promise that God makes to be at work in the world that allows us to move into the world and join in his work. Will you feel exposed? Probably so. Are you alone? Not even for an instant.

We've talked about moving into the world...now let's talk about that other part of the equation. We are called to move into the world in order to claim it for the God's Kingdom. We, like Abraham, are called to build a kingdom for another. Not to expand our kingdom, but to expand the Lord's.

It's interesting, the things that God promised Abraham are Kingly kind of things. A great nation. A great name. Being the mediation of blessing to the world. What

King wouldn't want that? That's every monarch's dream. But what is so key to see here is that includes Abraham's benefit, but it's for God's ultimate glory.

Look at what Abraham does as he goes through the land. He sets up Altars to the Lord. Places of sacrifice to God. Not statues of himself. Altars that claim this land as now belonging to God. Like explorers used to do when they found a new land. They would stick their country's flag in the ground. Like that great picture of Neil Armstrong placing the American flag on the moon.

And Abraham puts his altars in interesting places. Look at verse 6. Abraham "passed through the land to the place a Shechem, to the oak of Moreh..." And then we have this ominous line... "at that time, the Canaanites were in the land." The Oak of Moreh was actually already a place of worship. It was a shrine of pagan worship. The Canaanites had a shrine set up in that place to worship their gods. And where Abram sets up this altar is right in the middle of the land, right in view of a pagan shrine. This land is being claimed by the Lord.

Just like Adam and Noah before him, he is called to fill the land. Not just with altars, but with the image of God. Not his own statue, but the reflection of the Lord. To fill the land with the nation that God is going to bless him with and to use that land and that nation to bless the world. To be a beachhead for the Kingdom of God as it expands and fills the earth with God's glory.

And here's a very important piece of this. Abraham is not being called to be a King—he's being called to be a Steward. You know what a steward is? It's someone who keeps something for another. He's called to move into this land and expand someone else's kingdom.

There is a great example of this in the Lord of the Rings. In the Return of the King, the city of Gondor is kept by a steward. And he's called, appropriately, the steward of Gandor. And he rules and oversees the city and is supposed to protect it and make it flourish. But he's not the king. In fact, his full purpose is to wait for the King and to keep the Kingdom alive and well until the King returns.

But the tragedy of the story is that when the King does return, the steward becomes jealous. And it becomes apparent that he's been building the kingdom not for the king but for himself. And he can't take it when his power is taken away.

This is what King Herod should have been for Jesus. A steward. One who was supposed to build the Kingdom in eager expectation that the King would come. But that's not what he did. In fact, when the King did come, he tried to kill him.

We are called to Hold the place for the King. To Expand his kingdom and wait for his return. To fill the earth with His glory, his image. To claim the world, but not for ourselves. For the Lord.

This is what Abraham was called to do. To Move into this new land and claim it for the Lord. Christians are called to the same calling. Because as children of Abraham, heirs of the promises of God, Christians are now the People of God given the same calling. Christians are called to MOVE INTO the world in order to CLAIM IT FOR the Kingdom of God The only difference is that we get to claim the entire world not just one small land.

So How? How do we do that? Let's look at some short specifics.

First, we have to pray against our own kingdom building and invite others into that discussion. As human beings, we are not great at being stewards. We are bent toward moving away from the world and building our own little kingdom bubbles, building our names and taking security and identity in that. We need to pray that the Lord remove that from us, and we need to allow each other to enter into that process.

Secondly, we have to dig into the Church community. God's people are meant to reveal the beauty, peace, justice and mercy of the Lord. To show the flourishing that is God's nature to the world around. Let's start with each other. Dig in and see God work among you. If there is not peace, justice, beauty, grace, mercy in God's people, then none of that will be spread to the world either.

But third, we need to also get OUT of our safe church community. You don't have to come to everything the church does. Begin the moving into the world right

where you are. Get involved in with your neighbors. Get involved with your neighborhood. Work for the flourishing of your city. Bless those around you. Go. But start by going next door. I'm all for your going overseas, but if you really want to feel exposed, go next door. Talk to your neighbor about what he or she values, what they believe. Begin a relationship with your neighbor. The one who thinks that Christians are simply consumers. Listen to the way he describes Christians. Own it. And then surprise him by being something different.

Is that hard? Yep. Will you feel exposed? Yep. But guess what, we have even better proof of God's promise than Abraham. Even better than 7 promises. Because we are called to claim the world for a King who has already come and established his kingdom.

Jesus came to the world to reclaim it for the glory of God. To establish a new realm of peace and justice and mercy and beauty and flourishing. To bless the world through his sacrificial death. Jesus went. He left his father's house. He left his country. He left his throne so that the world might be blessed in him. So that he might build his kingdom on earth. A kingdom established upon the foundation of his blood.

This is not an insulated or consumer vision. It is a global, universal vision of a great king who is spreading his good and merciful rule over the whole earth. Let's get on board with that vision!