

Message: Journey to the Promised Land**READ BY SCRIPTURE READER:****PP#1:** Journey to the Promised Land

“The Lord brought us out from Egypt so that He might bring us in to Canaan, giving us the land that He swore to our ancestors.” Deuteronomy 6:23.

Journey to the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 6:23, “The Lord brought us out from Egypt so that He might bring us in to Canaan, giving us the land that He swore to our ancestors.”

PP#2-3: Hebrews 3:7-14

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear Jesus’ voice, 8 don’t have stubborn hearts as they did in the rebellion, on the day when they tested me in the desert. 9. That is where your ancestors challenged and tested me, though they had seen my work for forty years. 10 So I was angry with them. I said, ‘Their hearts always go off course, and they don’t know my ways.’ 11 Because of my anger I swore: ‘They will never enter my rest!’” [Psalm 95:7-11]

12 Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that none of you have an evil, unfaithful heart that abandons the living God. 13 Instead, encourage each other every day, as long as it’s called “today,” so that none of you become insensitive to God because of sin’s deception. 14 We are partners with Christ, but only if we hold on to the confidence we had in the beginning until the end.

Our Scripture today is from Hebrews 3:7-14. “So, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear Jesus’ voice, don’t have stubborn hearts as they did in the rebellion, on the day when they tested me in the desert. That is where your ancestors challenged and tested me, though they had seen my work for forty years. So I was angry with them. I said, ‘Their hearts always go off course, and they don’t know my ways.’ Because of my anger I swore: ‘They will never enter my rest!’”

“Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that none of you have an evil, unfaithful heart that abandons the living God. Instead, encourage each other every day, as long as it’s called “today,” so that none of you become insensitive to God because of sin’s deception. We are partners with Christ, but only if we hold on to the confidence we had in the beginning until the end.”

PP#4: *Map with the route of the Israelites from Egypt to Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land, with the following locations numbered: 1. Egypt/Slavery, 2. Crossing the Red Sea, 3. Mt. Sinai, 4. Wandering in the Desert, and 5. The Promised Land.*

PASTOR DAVID PREACHING:**I. Introduction:** Life is a Journey [*Walking from the back middle of the sanctuary to Station 1.*]

“Midway along the journey through life, I found myself lost in a dark wood, for I had wandered off the straight path.” This is how Dante’s begins *The Divine Comedy*, a story about life as a journey. Or perhaps you’ve been captured by other narratives of life as journey: Homer’s *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid* [a-NEE-id], Paul Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry*

Finn, or the story of *Forest Gump*. Life is a journey. Being a Christian is walking with Jesus on life's journey. Sometimes, like how Dante begins the book, we find ourselves "lost in a dark wood," having "wandered off the straight path." That's why we climb Mt. Sinai. [*Step up on the platform.*]

We've been walking with the Israelites on their journey, from Egypt, into the desert, and to Mt. Sinai, where God gave them the 10 Commandments: the path for living well. [*Stepping down and heading to Station 1.*] Their journey was a life of learning to follow God, who led them out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

PP#5: *Image of people walking on a journey*

And we can see our journeys in their journey. This morning, we're going to walk with the Israelites, and also find our own life journey with God.

Kids, we have a travel bag for each of you. Come on up here and get one. Don't look inside it yet. Just take it back to your seat and give it to an adult. As we travel, your adult will share with items for the journey from the travel pack.

PP#6: *Images of bondage and slavery, like shackles, burdens, whips, etc.*

Subtitled, "Stuck in Slavery"

II. Station 1: Stuck in Slavery [*Speaking from the back left of the church.*]

The Human Condition.

The journey of the Israelites begins in Egypt, where they are stuck in slavery. The Israelites knew vaguely that they belonged to God and that Egypt was not their home. They were stuck in a place of pain, oppression, fear, powerlessness and a search for identity. They were not where they belonged.

This is a powerful image for all people before they come to know God. This is where our journeys begin, too. We realize that we are caught in a trap of serving insatiable masters. We are slaves to selfishness, to pain, to fear, to addiction. We long to be free. We yearn for abundant life. We know are not where we belong.

The Gospel speaks the truth of our human condition. We are slaves to sin. We cannot free ourselves, no matter how hard we work. Our only hope comes from One who is stronger!

If you are at this place on your journey, you need to hear that God made you for a different life. But, you must stop trying to free yourself. It is impossible. You need someone stronger. Cry out to your God. Ask Him to come and rescue you!

Adults with kid bags, in the bag is a Chinese finger trap. Give it to your kid, and show them how it works, and how you can't get out of them on your own. You need help!

PP#7: *Image of a parted Red Sea looming ahead*

Subtitled, "God to the Rescue"

III. Station 2: Crossing the Red Sea [*Speaking from the front left of the church.*]

Prevenient Grace.

God came to their rescue. He sent the plagues against Egypt, but the Israelites were spared by the Passover Lamb. Moses led the people out, but they were trapped by the Red Sea. Again God came and worked their salvation. He parted the waters and guided them across on dry ground. God saved them from their enemies.

The Gospel message is that Jesus came to clear the way to God. He died on the cross to pay the price for human sin. He rose again to defeat death and make a way for us to full life. Jesus still today offers His salvation, His work of freedom, for anyone who would receive it.

Sanctifying and Regenerating Grace.

At some point in your life's journey, you must stop your fruitless striving and instead put your hope and trust in Jesus. Only His death and resurrection can free you. You must choose to leave your former way of life behind. You do this by repenting of your sin, giving your heart to Jesus, and receiving the Holy Spirit into your life. If you have never done this, now is a great time: make *today* this stop here on your life's journey. Baptism marks this death to your former life and your rebirth into the new life God intends for you. The water of baptism links you to the Israelites walking through the parted waters of the Red Sea.

Kids, your travel packs have a bottle of water. Take a drink, and feel how it refreshes you. This is like what Jesus does for your whole life! Jesus is the Living Water.

PP#8: *Image, from the base, looking up to a cloud-covered mountain*
Subtitled, "Meeting God on the Mountain"

IV. Station 3: Meeting God on the Mountain [*Speaking from the front middle on the platform.*]

Sanctifying Grace.

There is a shorter, more direct path to the Promised Land. But God leads the Israelites, by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, deep into one of the most desolate places on Planet Earth: the Sinai Desert. Why? Because God's people need a new plan for life. Away from all the temptations, God tells the people He must be their focus in life. God creates a marriage covenant with the people: God chooses them as His own, and the people commit faithfulness to only Him. God gives them the gift of the Law, the plan for how to live right, to live abundantly, to live best. The Ten Commandments, etched in stone, are etched on their hearts, in love. They show the two key foundations: to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love others as their love ourselves. The system of sacrifices provides a temporary solution to earn forgiveness for their sin.

Jesus said to those around Him, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) We must choose to walk as disciples of Jesus. That means trusting in Him enough to agree to walk His path. It means not choosing the other paths that may look better to us, or easier, or that seem more reasonable. It is agreeing to live God's way, with the wisdom that He has laid out for us. Jesus, who fulfilled the Old Testament Law, said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35) This is the path that Jesus calls us to. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The way to the Promised Land, to where we want to go, is only via the path that God provides. We choose to walk God's path.

Robert Frost, in "The Road Not Taken," describes it, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth...."

When we meet God on the mountain, and invite Him into our lives, we must continue to choose to follow Him. There are always two roads diverging in front of us. God lays out the best path for us, but it is steep, and narrow, and difficult. The other road promises what we like, ease, and self-indulgence. Daily, moment by moment, we must choose which path to take.

Perhaps you are here. Perhaps you have chosen God, and you have given your heart to Jesus. Good! But there is no chair here, no bed. You cannot just stay here. God calls you to go. Jesus walks on ahead. There is a higher calling, the calling of discipleship. It is not just choosing Jesus, it is walking with Jesus, living for Jesus. It is living out the new commandment to love God and love one another in our daily lives. Perhaps you need to start moving. Perhaps you need to stop trying to hold on to Jesus while walking your own path. Discipleship means picking up your cross of self denial and walking the path of life that Jesus gives. Will you embrace discipleship?

Kids, in the bags are flashlights. The Bible says that Jesus is like a light who show us the way we need to go. God has a way for you to live. The flashlight will remind you to find and choose to live by God's plan.

PP#9: *Image of the rugged wilderness of the Desert of Sinai, or Zin, or Negev.*
Subtitled, "Wandering in the Desert"

V. Station 4: Wandering in the Desert [*Speaking from the front right of the church.*]

Sanctifying grace.

The Israelites struggled to follow God. They had a hard time facing their problems, facing their enemies, a hard time trusting that God would take care of them, provide for them, lead them. God continued to supply all their needs: giving them a sweet, flaky bread called manna; quail for meat; and water to drink. God invited them to enter the Promised Land, but they faltered, fearful of what lay ahead. So they had to spend years wandering in the desert, learning to trust God and to put away their timid desires to go back to Egypt.

Those to choose to be disciples of Jesus have been given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads us through the wilderness of life, providing for us, guiding us, growing us in holiness. He works on our sins, calling us to change. He renews our hearts, replacing bitterness, resentment, woundedness, selfishness, pride, with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This can seem to take a long time, but God's path is a perfecting path. God leads His people through all kinds of ups and downs and curves and dangers, all the while growing us in holiness to perfection in love.

My guess is that many of us are somewhere here on the journey. We struggle as we walk with Jesus, facing all kinds of problems. Paul calls it battling with the old self, wanting to go back to the more familiar way we lived before. The Holy Spirit uses the struggles we face on the outside to make us face our selfishness on the inside. All the while we learn to hang on to Jesus and to let the Holy Spirit grow us in faithfulness and love. We are heading to the Promised Land, but it takes a while. We must learn to trust God more, to depend on Him more, to let the Holy Spirit mold and shape us. What do you fear ahead? What lies ahead that you cannot face on your own? In what ways must you trust in God and step out in courage?

The wilderness is not easy, but there is much joy here. We celebrate God's faithfulness and our growth. We depend on God's provision. We experience a deepening peace and joy.

Kids, there's a snack in your travel bag of frosted flakes. That's a bit like the manna that the Israelites ate for 40 years while in the wilderness. Go ahead and eat it, and remember that God provides all that you need for every day. He will grow you up to be big and mature disciples!

PP#10: *Beautiful image for heaven/glory*
Subtitled, "The Promised Land"

