

## God's Kingdom Breaking In

Exodus 3:1-12

During the month of December we will be observing Advent. The word “advent” is Latin for our English word “coming.” Fourteen hundred years ago – four Sundays were set aside on the church calendar to ponder four different “comings of Christ” spoken of in the New Testament. Each of these comings display different ways in which the Lord Jesus breaks into the affairs of this world.

All through the Gospel of Mark we have heard John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus and His disciples telling people to repent and believe in Jesus, because the Kingdom of God was “breaking in” upon the earth in a new and dynamic way. God the Son became a man. That is a mind-blowing event. It was the ultimate self-disclosure of God to man, but it was not the only time God has “broken in” and revealed Himself to people in remarkable ways.

This morning we will look at Exodus 3, when God “broke in” and revealed Himself to Moses. But in order to understand why God did that, I need to take you back another 600 years to when God broke into the life of a 75 year old, childless man named Abram. This breaking in came with some world-changing promises. Let's listen to **Genesis 12:1-4**,

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country [modern day Iraq], your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.<sup>2</sup> I will make you into **a great nation** and . . . make your name great, and you will be a blessing.<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; **and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**’<sup>4</sup> So Abram left, as the LORD had told him.”

Because Abram was to be the father of a great nation, his name was changed to Abraham [father of a multitude]. God also promised Abraham that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan, which at that time was inhabited by six different people groups – according to Exodus 3:8. The one thing all six groups shared in common – was their growth in **wickedness**. The fact that God brought Abraham into the land of Canaan, was an act of God's grace, whereby He brought light and truth into a place of spiritual darkness. I should say more light – because Melchizedek, who was a great man of God, was also a resident in that land. But neither Melchizedek or Abraham or Isaac or Jacob were able to reverse the downward slide into wickedness that was taking place among the inhabitants of Canaan.

That reality may be why God arranged for Abraham's descendants to become a great nation while they were in the land of Egypt. Becoming a great nation was the good news. The bad news was that the Israelites were going to remain in Egypt **400 years** – and **become slaves**. Why such a long period of time? Part of the answer was so God could make the Israelites into a multitude of people. But that is not the reason God gave to Abraham in Genesis 15:16. God said that Abraham's descendants would remain in another land 400 years because that is how long it would take for the wickedness of the Canaanites to reach its full measure. And when their wickedness was complete, God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and used them as His instrument to judge the Canaanites.

Does God have the right to judge wickedness? Of course He does. But

I ask this question because many people read the book of Joshua – see the Israelites putting entire towns and villages of Canaanites to death – and they are shocked and appalled by the terrible bloodshed. When I read the book of Joshua, I am grieved – and amazed. I am **grieved** by the hardness of heart among the people of Canaan because they refused to repent and make peace with God. They became more wicked (1) in spite of the witness of godly people like Melchizedek and Abraham; 2) they refused to repent in spite of hearing about the great plagues God sent upon the Egyptians – due to their wickedness; 3) they refused to honor God in spite of hearing that God parted the Red Sea – so the Israelites could walk out on dry land; 4) they would not repent in spite of watching with their own eyes as God dried up the Jordan River, so the Israelites could walk into Canaan on dry land. **In spite of all the signs and warnings** that God gave them – the Canaanites continued to grow in wickedness. Their lack of repentance was the cause of their deaths. All of those facts **grieve me**.

However, there was at least one Canaanite who did repent and believe in the true and living God. That person was Rahab the harlot, who became a part of Israel and a part of Christ's genealogy [Matthew 1:5]; which shows us that God's grace has always been available to all who repent.

What **amazes me** is that God waited 400 years to see if the Canaanites would repent of their sin **before he judged them**. So instead of being disgusted with God, readers of Joshua **need to gather the facts I have just reviewed and be amazed at God's patience**. When people don't bother doing that, it demonstrates how eager they are to think the worst of God.

As we come to Exodus 3, we discover that the Israelites are still being held in slavery by the Egyptians. But God had already begun “to break into Egypt” by saving the life of Moses when he was baby; and then arranging for Moses to grow up and be educated in the royal palace of Pharaoh. But at the age of 40, Moses saw an Egyptian savagely beating a Hebrew slave, and when he did not stop, Moses killed him. Moses then fled from Egypt and settled in the land of Midian. And so as we read Exodus 3:1-5, Moses is 80 years old – and has been a shepherd for 40 of those years,

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian [the Midianites were descendants of Abraham through his wife Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died], and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb [also known as Sinai], the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush [to whom did angels appear when Christ broke into the world? Lowly shepherds]. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.’ <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’ <sup>5</sup> Do not come any closer,’ God said. ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’”

Verse 3 tells us that Moses wanted to know why the bush burned, but was not consumed. Most people in the circumstances of Moses would not have paid much attention to a burning bush because they would have been too busy wallowing in self pity. After all – Moses had lost his royalty in Egypt, the world power of his day – and was tending sheep in Midia – an obscure land of an obscure people. But there is no hint of Moses

wallowing in self-pity. He had suffered a failure in Egypt, but was learning meekness by faithfully shepherding sheep in Midia. And the meekness of Moses was more prized by God than all the knowledge he had acquired in the royal palace of Pharaoh. At the age of 80, Moses was fully engaged in life – and took time to stand in awe of a burning bush that was not consumed.

Hundreds of years ago, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a Victorian poet, wrote the following about this incident in the life of Moses. She declares, “Earth is crammed with heaven. And every common bush is afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes . . . only he who sees.” I believe every time a seed sprouts into a life-giving stalk of wheat, a miracle of God has taken place. After all, there is no science lab in the world that can make a seed that sprouts into a stalk of wheat. But God does it all the time – if we see and take off our shoes.

In verse 6, God identifies Himself to Moses,

“Then he said, ‘I am the God of your father [Moses’ father was Amram, who was probably still alive since he lived to be 137 years old - Exodus 6:20. And I am], the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been physically dead for hundreds of years. But they were still very much alive with God and enjoying the fruit of the covenant they had entered into with God while alive on earth. And I believe a part of that fruit was being able to witness the fulfilling of the promises God had made to them. When we think about it, how could God have looked Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the eye if He wasn’t going to

keep those promises?

Did you notice that Horeb is called the mountain of God in verse 1? And in verse 5, Moses had to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. That is quite impressive. You would think that this holy place would be a major tourist attraction today. The reason it isn't – is because there is no precise knowledge of where that mountain is located? The Jewish people never built a shrine at Sinai – because it was only a holy place when God's special presence was there. When God's special presence departed, that mountain ceased to be holy.

Is there a holy place on earth today; a place of God's special presence? Listen to **I Corinthians 3:16-17**,

“Don't you know that you yourselves [believers in Christ] are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred [holy], and you are that temple.”

When I pray for persecuted Christians, and I hope we all are, I am very aware that their persecutors are in a bad place. If they do not repent, God's judgment will “break in” upon them. Friends, the breaking in of God's Kingdom will not be good news for those who refuse to repent of their unbelief.

In Exodus 3:7-8, God begins to speak about His soon coming “break in” upon Egypt and Canaan,

“The LORD said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.’<sup>8</sup> So I have **come down** [with His sleeves rolled up] to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them

up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites” [Deuteronomy 7:1 adds the Gergashites].

In verse 7, God refers to the Jewish people as “my people.” Does that mean they were perfect in their faith and obedience to God? Unfortunately after being in Egypt 400 years – there was a lot of Egypt in them.

**Deuteronomy 9:4-6**, records what Moses said to the Israelites, just before they entered the land of Canaan,

“After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, ‘The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.’ No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. <sup>5</sup> It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land . . . the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. <sup>6</sup> Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

One of the strong indications that the Bible is inspired by God – is because if the Jewish people had written it by their own volition and imagination – they would **not** have made themselves look so bad. The two reasons listed in Deuteronomy as to why God was “breaking in” at the time of Moses had to do with (1) the wickedness of the Canaanites and (2) God’s integrity to always keep His promises. And friends, if God kept His promise to Abraham by giving that stiff-necked generation of Israelites the land of Canaan, will He not also keep His promise to bless all the nations of the earth – through the descendants of Abraham? The New Testament is very clear that it is Abraham’s descendants who have entered into the

New Covenant through faith in Christ – that God is using to bless all the nations. And what do New Covenant believers share in common? The blessing of having God’s Moral Law written on our hearts [Jeremiah 31:33]. And yes, the Bible is also clear that God’s Moral Law cannot save us, because no one can keep it perfectly, nor can it change our hearts. But the Bible is equally clear that people whose hearts have been changed through faith in Christ will embrace God’s Moral Law because it is written on our hearts. In John 14:23, Jesus said if you love Me you will keep My commands. And when we love and treasure Christ, it brings us into an ordered and abundant life. I did not say an **easy life** – I said an **abundant life** – which is so rich and full that the **trials of life** cannot overcome it.

Let’s observe what else God reveals to Moses in verses 9-12,

““And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them [God hates oppression and slavery – and so should we].<sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ [that looked like an impossibly big job]<sup>12</sup> And God said, ‘**I will be with you.** And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’”

When God told Moses He would be with him, it was God’s guarantee that he would be successful in the task God had given him. Sometimes Christians are too focused on ourselves. God did not come down and break into the life of Moses – for the sole purpose of giving Moses an abundant life. God broke into the life of Moses in order to make him a servant to the Jewish people, who were in turn to be servants to all the



peoples of the earth. They were to be a holy nation of priests, who lifted the needs of people to God AND showcased the kingdom of God upon the earth. For a kingdom to exist, there must be a king, there must be citizens, and there must be laws to help people live together in a peaceful, orderly way. Israel had all of that. And so do all Christians. I Peter 2:9 declares to all Christians,

“You are a chosen race [Abraham’s true descendants], a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into to his marvelous light.”

Over two thousand years ago, the Lord Jesus broke into this world, and He is the King of kings and Lord of lords; whether people acknowledge that or not. The citizens of His Kingdom are those who embrace His Kingship and are devoted to keeping His commands. And the more people who join us in embracing Christ as King, the more the Kingdom of God advances upon the earth.

Moses was successful in leading the Israelites out of Egypt because God was with him. Christians, we too have been given an enormous task – to make disciples of all the nations. And just like Moses, we are not adequate to accomplish this task in our own strength. But our ascended Lord Jesus **is** – and He has promised to always be with us as we do it – and that makes all the difference. Do you believe that? Let’s pray.