

The Bible: Our True Story
Act Three—
“...In a New and Growing Land”

Passages: Deut. 26:1–15
John 2:1–11

I once heard the story of a Sunday School teacher who was very diligent in her lesson preparation. The lesson that Sunday was on **David and Goliath**, that wonderful tale of a little shepherd boy who kills the giant, Goliath, with a single stone from his slingshot.

And this is how the lesson went: First, the teacher got two children from the class to be dressed up. One was dressed up as Goliath and the other was dressed up as David. Onto Goliath's outfit were attached strips of paper. As each one was peeled off, they revealed a list of sins: Stealing, cheating, lying, bad language, bad temper, etc.... “These”, said the teacher, “are the giants in our lives. They come to hurt us and to destroy our lives. Can we stop Goliath?”, she asked the kids. “Yes, David shows us how!”

The teacher then brought forward the second child, dressed like David. Even though David was only a little shepherd boy, he knew God and trusted God to help him stand against the enemy. At this point, David was given a slingshot marked with word “faith”. Then, he was given five smooth stones. Each of these was marked with a different word; obedience, service, prayer, fellowship, bible reading. David was then told to pretend to shoot these stones at Goliath and Goliath was told to fall down, which he did with great dramatic flair! All the kids applauded! The application of the story was simple: **You can be like David!** You can kill the evil giants in your life by trusting God and following in his ways.

So, did the teacher do a good job of teaching this story? Chew on that question while I pray. **Let’s pray.**

As we saw last week, **the Kingdom of God** is about people... **God's people**...real people, like you and me. But, God's Kingdom is also about a **place!** Whether that place be the earth (Gen 1), the Garden of Eden (Gen 2), or the land of Canaan (Gen 12), **God's place** is where **God's people** can live **under God's rule.**

What this means, of course, is that our religion is deeply rooted and connected to the earth. As the Scriptures say, **"For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness therein!"** It belongs to Him, and we've been placed on it for a very good reason. In fact, from the very beginning, God created all humanity from the dust of the earth. This means that our basic identity as human beings is tied to the earth. ('Adam' and 'Adama' basically mean 'dirt'!) Our food is a product of the land. Our community is here, on the land. Our security and livelihood are tied to the earth. We are earthly creatures! Moreover, God has raised us up (as His image bearers) to rule over the earth as His vice-regents! Creatures of the dust now rule over the dust, in His name.

Now, three weeks ago, I began to talk about the **villain of the Biblical Story**...the one who we call 'Satan'. Although we talked about the fact that Satan deceived Adam and Eve, we didn't talk much about the how and why of his tactics...a lot of which is tied to the land! You see, Satan knows that if he's going to defeat God, he must take over the earth; but to take over the earth, **he must get Adam and Eve on his side!** If he can get God's collaborators... God's vice-regents of the earth... to change sides and become his collaborators, Satan will rule the earth and overthrow God's rule!

And that's what is happening, all over the world! The earth is under siege and Satan is calling the shots! Deceit, corruption, power struggles, land grabs, dishonesty, greed—all these things make for war between human beings and distract them from the proper rule of God's earth. Indeed, there's truth in what Jesus said: Satan is the ruler of this world! Ever since the Fall, Satan has been getting the true rulers (us, human beings) to play his

games...to believe his lies. **Satan has got us to do his bidding!** In this way, the land has become the battleground between God and Satan, and Satan seems to be winning!

Indeed, this is one of the central plots of the OT, namely, “Who will control the land of this earth?” Will the usurper keep the world in his grasp, or will God gradually recapture the land of this world and bring it all back under his benevolent control? And if God is going to recapture the land, how will he do it? **The answer again lies in human beings!** Since God (by covenant) has ceded His rule of the earth over to human beings, **He must use human beings to bring the earth back under His rule!** But for this to happen, we must **willingly** align ourselves with His desires and divine strategies. Only then will the earth be gradually recaptured and restored.

If you understand this battle, then you will understand why God took a barren couple, Abraham and Sarah, and took them to a new land where they could begin all over again! Of course, it’s important to remember that people were already living in this land. Furthermore, they were idolaters... falling on their knees in worship of false gods and idols, instruments of Satan to keep the minds of human beings fixed on heavenly things... spirits in trees and mountains, the stars, moon and sun...so they were no longer any earthly good. I mean, once your eyes have been deceived into seeing God’s good world as a spirit world...a place controlled by evil spirits which need to be appeased..., Satan has you where he wants you. Like an addiction to pokies, you will put all your energies into this process of appeasement. Not only will you sacrifice your money and time on this invisible, hyper-spiritualised world, you will even sacrifice your children on its altars!

Can you see why Abraham and Sarah were given this land? God was calling them to take it over...to fight against Satan’s influences

here...and to gradually expand God's hold over this land until the darkness of idolatry was pushed back and the entire earth was finally liberated from Satan's grip. And for a while, the plan worked! Gradually, their small family expanded. And as it expanded, it took over more land in, but not necessarily through warfare. It was often through cooperation with the neighbouring kings! Abraham, we're told, regularly found great favour in their sight and it was these kings who often offered land to Abraham's growing descendants.

But something radically changed towards the time we come to the end of the Book of Genesis. As you may remember, in chapter 41 of Genesis, there's a famine in this good land. Suddenly, Abraham's growing family of 70 people are forced to go down to Egypt. "But", you ask, "how is it possible? Isn't this God's place? Isn't He protecting His people? What has gone wrong?" My hunch is that the devil had become frustrated with the growing success of God's people and their influence over the land! And so, he somehow interfered with the weather patterns of Canaan, just to get God's people to leave the land!

Indeed, Satan has been so successful that it takes another 400 years before God can get His people back to Canaan and re-commence this expansion program! And even after God gets them out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, it will take another 40 years to re-educate (what has become) a bunch of grumblers in the wilderness (another evidence of Satan's intervention?) before they are ready and willing to follow God into the Promised Land and fight against the devil.

Even then, things don't look so rosy! As **God's new people** stand on the edge of the Land and get reports of a land "flowing with milk and honey!", this new generation begin to freak out at the fact that the land is already occupied... and, what's worse, it's occupied by giants-- mean and nasty giants who are steeped in pagan idolatry and child sacrifices!

Now, what God says to His people at this point may be hard for us to swallow—but here it is anyway! **God commands His people to go in and cleanse His land!** That is, they must eliminate every trace of Satan's presence and influence, even if this involves killing entire families! Yes, it sounds totally barbaric and the direct opposite of what we think a loving God should do-- but the point is that **God's land must be purified so that Satan has no more power to corrupt God's people and stop them from expanding God's Kingdom into all the world.** This, in fact, is the whole story behind the Books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings!

And this is why the story of **David and Goliath** is not merely about personal morality or resisting Satan's individual temptations! As much as we may cringe, the fact is that **the story of David is the story of Holy War!** David (just like all the other great leaders in Israel-- Joshua, Caleb, Gideon, Deborah, Jephthah and Samuel) is the man of God's choosing who is filled with the Holy Spirit to take up the fight and lead God's people against the usurper, the devil. In the power of the Spirit, these leaders are able to cleanse the land until it becomes God's place—a new Garden of Eden—from which God's people will be able to participate in the gradual expansion of God's Kingdom over the earth!

Indeed, under their leadership, **the Kingdom of God** finally begins to take shape on earth! **God's people in God's place under God's rule!**

Sadly, however, this good leadership seems always to be interspersed with bad leadership—leaders who reject God's Spirit and who refuse to stand against evil. David's son, **Solomon**, is a good example. As King, he takes hundreds of foreign wives into his palace who will gradually influence him for evil. After him,

there will be numerous other self-serving kings who will arise in Israel (like King Ahab and Jezebel); leaders hell-bent on serving themselves and, thus, placing themselves and God's people into Satan's hands.

Indeed, by the time we get to the writings of the prophets (Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel...) the increasing corruption of the land will mean that the land itself will rise up against God's people, and they, like Adam and Eve, will be evicted from God's place—spewed out into exile!

So, now, do you see? **The whole Old Testament is but one story of “God's people” in and out of “God's place”.**

Now, you may be sitting there thinking, “OK– I get it. I can see the story of the Old Testament as God's people in God's place. I can see how sin and Satan have repeatedly interfered with God's plan to expand His Kingdom over the entire earth! I get all that! **But, what does that have to do with me, today? ”**

That's a great question, and the one to which we now turn! You see, for us to understand the implications of the Old Testament story of the Land and apply it to our lives today, we need to recognise what the Land was meant to look like and why the ancient battle with Satan needed to be fought! Only then will we be able to apply it to us, God's people who live in the 21st century.

1. The Land was meant to be a place where God's people could deepen their relationship with God and thus be strengthened for the fight.

Just think back to the Garden of Eden! Sure, Adam and Eve worked alongside God during the day. But, in the cool of the evening, this place became a sanctuary, where Adam and Eve could rest with God. The same was true for Abram and Sarai. Their new land was surely a place of work. But there was also time

for rest as well...with God! Even in Egypt, God's people continued the regular practice of worshipping Yahweh, in defiance of Pharaoh's orders! And when God's people finally came back to the land of Canaan after 400 years living in Egypt, they all took careful note to follow the pattern of Sabbath worship prescribed in the law of Moses! At each point in their history, **God's people** made sure to stop and turn **God's place** into a house of worship; a place to rest and be renewed in God's presence. As a result, they would be ready and equipped to fight Satan.

Doesn't that also apply to us today? (This is where some of that Sunday School lesson about David does come in!) I mean, Satan has got us on a tread-mill! In our hyper-busy world, we have no time to enter into **God's place** and be renewed in His presence! That's why we need to find sacred places! Places dedicated to worship! That's why we have need parks and recreation areas—places where we can be alone and quiet before God. That's why we need cell groups and prayer groups where we can hear God speak to us through others. We all need to build in time to spend in **God's place**, so don't let the devil keep you so busy you are never renewed in His love and in the fellowship of His people. Otherwise, instead of fighting him, we will keep falling into his hands.

2. The Land was meant to be a place where God's people might learn to live by faith and, assured of God's providence, thus be empowered to resist the devil's lies and temptations.

This is what we see in both Genesis 1 and 2, as Adam and Eve live in a place of abundance and life. Here, they were to learn to live in total dependence on God's provision. The same can be said of Abram and Sarai. In Genesis 12, as God walks them through this new land, they discover the goodness of His provision! That's why Abram built altars wherever he went, to thank God for such grace and provision! Indeed, everywhere God's people went, every land they lived in (from Canaan to Egypt, to the desert, and back to

Canaan again) God always provided His people with a place where all their physical needs were met. Clearly, God could be trusted! They knew they could live by faith in His provision alone.

Today's passage from **Deuteronomy 26** highlights this fact. As God's people contemplate entering the Promised Land, God says this to them:

“When you have entered the land the *LORD* your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, ² take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the *LORD* your God is giving you and put them in a basket... ¹⁰ Place the basket before the *LORD* your God and bow down before him.”

Why were you called to present the **firstfruits** of your crops at God's altar? Why the **firstfruits** and not the **last** fruits. It was an act of trust... always believing that more would come; that God would always meet your needs! It was an act of faith that, ultimately, undermined Satan's rule...for Satan's power to rule is in the power of fear and worry! Once you trust God, Satan's hold is broken!

So, do **you** trust God for your daily provisions? I know none of us lives off the land, so none of us has had to bring our firstfruits to God; and yet, what about your income, generally? Do you show your trust in His provision by giving the firstfruits of your paycheck to Him rather than waiting till the end of the month to see what's left over? Let me say—**this is a battle for us all!** Satan wants us to believe that we never have enough...that we can never be satisfied or secure! But will we live by faith and not by sight? To live by sight is to play into the devil's hands and doubt God's goodness!

3. The Land was meant to be a place where God's people might learn to be generous with their possessions, thus

publicly proving that Satan is a liar and a thief, and drawing the world to God's abundant love.

According to the last few verses of today's passage, the firstfruits of the harvest were meant to be shared with the needy! ¹¹ **Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the *LORD* your God has given to you and your household.** ¹² **When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.** ” By faith, God's people were encouraged to be generous with both fellow Jews and outsiders, in the belief that God's good land would meet everyone's needs! In other words, **generosity** has the power to destroy Satan's grip, as people see (and are drawn to) the goodness of God in loving acts of mercy, kindness and compassion!

And that, of course, still applies to us today!

But the sad fact is that most Western Christians have given in to the lie of Satan. We have turned more and more inward, to a privatised view of life (where I own my own land and my own house). This, in fact, is seen as my entitlement, to be used for my own private enjoyment. Indeed, the Great Australian Dream of "owning a detached house on a fenced block of land" has now morphed into having bigger houses on smaller blocks of land, enclosed and shut off from everyone else. And Christians (just as much as everyone else) have fallen victim to this lie! **We must see it as a tactic of Satan!**

The big question we, God's people, must face is, "Are we sharing the firstfruits of our land with others, particularly the needy and the foreigners in our midst, that they too might **rejoice in all the good things that the Lord your God has given you and your household?**" "Are we sharing the abundance of God's provisions in order to draw the world into His arms?" This is the only way we will defeat Satan in our day and expand the Kingdom.

Conclusion:

As we've seen today, the **Promised land** of rest and worship, abundance and sharing, was also meant to be a place of battle—the venue where God would gradually and systematically defeat His Enemy, the devil! But He wouldn't do it alone! His plan was always to enlist His people who would willingly use the land for the corporate good, in generosity and love for all, promoting a gradual victory over the evil one so that the Land could expand until it eventually covered the whole earth!

But, of course, it is here that we need to turn our eyes onto Jesus! For although many OT battles were won against God's enemy, as we know from the OT, each of these victories was only temporary! No one, no matter how powerful or faithful or righteous, was able to permanently defeat the Evil One...not even King David! Why not? The fact is, **every soldier has a chink in their armour!** (Gideon had a problem with doubt! Deborah had a problem with pride! Samson had a problem with women! Saul had a problem with sorcery! David's chink was his sexual fling with Bathsheba, a sin that was later forgiven, but which nevertheless came back to haunt him and to destroy much of the good work that he had done!)

And that is why Jesus had to come—for He is the only true and perfect saviour! Here was a man who had never sinned! Here was a man who had no dicey background which the devil could dig up and use against him. There was no child born out of wedlock; no testimony of séances; no compromise in his faith. Jesus was always **God's person**, always living in God's place, always accepting God's rule. And as a result, **the Kingdom of God** fully appeared on earth **in Him!** Moreover, in Him it expanded, as he reached out to foreigners, and widows, and orphans, as well as the sick and the demon-possessed.

Indeed, we can even say that Jesus is God's place, a mobile Kingdom of God! In Him and through Him, all people can come to

worship the Father and be renewed in the fellowship of the saints. In His arms we find the generosity of God and the compassion of God towards the outcast and lonely. And when you see Him turning water into wine, that's no magic trick! What you see is the bounty of the Promised Land flowing out through Him... being fully restored in Him! Indeed, He is **God's place**; He is God's Garden of Eden and Promised Land; in Him, we enter God's Temple where healing and blessing flow to all.

Moreover, wherever He goes, the devil is always defeated! That's why He can still do in your life what He has done in so many other lives! He can liberate you and set you free from the devil's hold. And when you are free, you can do as His disciples have always done: You can go into all the world and preach the Gospel—telling the world about the Saviour, thus further expanding God's place to the uttermost parts of the earth! That's why the Bible says, **Turn to Him and be saved, all the ends of the earth!** (**...not to David or anyone else, but to Jesus!**) Turn to Him and, in Him, discover God's never-ending, ever-expanding Kingdom.

And be assured that, one day, in Jesus Christ and through the valiant faith and lifestyle of His people, the enemy will be fully defeated and the beauty of **God's Kingdom** will be extended to every part of this earth!

Let's pray!