

Talk Number Five

We cannot create God's new world



Have you seen the film *The Beach*? It is the story of Richard, an idealistic traveller played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who wants to find a perfect life in an unspoilt world. So he joins a group of people who live on a beautiful, remote beach. They have escaped from the rest of the world to create their own paradise. It really is a beautiful part of the world. The film was set on Phi Phi Le island in southern Thailand. Everything about it looks ideal: the crystal clear turquoise water; the almost white sand; the sheer cliffs dropping down into the ocean. In the film, the island was located about 2km off the mainland, but it might as well have been 1,000km. It was a different world from the hustle, bustle and grime of Bangkok. At first, everything seems too good to be true, and it seems that Richard and his friends have found everything they have ever wanted: the world they all wanted! But it isn't too long before they realise they cannot escape from themselves. Richard discovers that in the group there is hatred, rivalry and manipulation. Just as significantly, he finds those same vices in himself. He thinks he has found the world we all want - but this paradise becomes a horrible nightmare.

In our last session we saw that God made a promise to a man called Abraham.

1. When we rejected God we became his enemies, but God promises a new people who will know him.
2. When we rejected God we spoilt God's good world, but God promises a new world - a place of security, plenty and rest.

The Bible is the story of how God goes about keeping that promise.

1. God set his people free and gave them a land of plenty and security

The events we have looked at in this session are spectacular and larger than life. The famous Hollywood director Cecil B. DeMille captured it in his film *The Ten Commandments* with Carlton Heston in the starring role. Steven Spielberg gave us the animated film *The Prince of Egypt* in which he re-told the events.

In Egypt God's people were not free to worship God and they were some considerable distance away from the land God had promised. But God sent a man called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and back to the good land he had promised to Abraham. God sent miraculous disasters on Egypt to persuade the king of Egypt to let the Israelites go free. The last and most terrible was the death of every first born child. Even then the king of Egypt changed his mind and chased after the people. The Israelites found themselves with the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them. It looked like there was no escape. But then God miraculously and amazingly parted the Red Sea to let them pass through. When the Egyptians followed the waters closed over them and they were drowned. Look at Nehemiah 9:9-11.

God had rescued his people. We call this 'the Exodus' which means 'going out' or 'exit'. God had rescued his people *out* of Egypt. He had set them free. He had also judged the enemies of his people, those who refused to obey his Word.

Between Egypt and the Land of Promise, at Mount Sinai, God gave his people a set of laws. Look at Nehemiah 9:13-14. It has been suggested that this was like a Bill of Rights, but it was just as much a Bill of Responsibilities. The rule of the king of Egypt had been harsh and cruel. But God's law protected people from cruelty. It made sure everyone was provided for. It was a rule of blessing and freedom. At the heart of the Law was the 10 Commandments, and at the heart of the 10 commandments was the 'Sabbath', which verse 14 talks about. 'Sabbath' means 'rest, and the Sabbath day was a special day of rest that was a sign of the everlasting rest that God had promised. In Egypt the descendants of Abraham had been slaves. Their lives were nothing but work, work and more work. By giving them this one day at the end of the working week God was reminding them that his 'rest' not their work was their destiny. It was a weekly reminder from God of the world we all want!

God told his people that if they lived under his law, then all the other nations would marvel at how good it was to live under God's rule. People would be attracted to God through the life of his people. The people would be a light to the nations.

2. The people could not create God's new world

You would have thought that at last we would see a perfect society. God has rescued his people. He had given them a law of freedom and invited them to enjoy his blessing.

But the people problem still persists. The descendants of Abraham still do not trust God or obey him. God invited them to enter the land he had promised to their illustrious father. He said he would fight with them and give them victory. But they were afraid. They allowed fear to rule their hearts rather than faith and refused to take the land. And so a whole generation died in the desert. Look at Nehemiah 9:15-17.

But God would not be thwarted by the rebellion of these people anymore than he was going to be frustrated by the rebellion of all those who had preceded them. He gave the land to the next generation. They did take the land -winning many remarkable and amazing victories. Look at Nehemiah 9:22-27. '*They enjoyed your blessings*' (Nehemiah 9:25, NLT), we are told.

It will come as no surprise to us to learn that the people did not trust God or obey him. They started to follow other gods - false gods with cruel practices. Instead of being a light *to* the nations, they were corrupted *by* the nations. Finally the people are exiled into Babylon and the land is captured and the promise to Abraham seems empty. The people made a mess of living as God's people in God's land because they doubted God's word and rejected his rule.

The lesson is clear: we cannot create the world we all want. Our dreams of utopia always fail. Many people have tried to create a perfect world. They have tried to create the world we all want for themselves.

1. Some people have done it by escaping to create perfect communities only to find they become infected with the problems they hoped they could leave behind.

2. Some people have tried to bring about a new world through revolution. But time and again what started out full of idealism, becomes corrupt and oppressive.
3. Often people today try to create their own little individual paradise - with a good income, a lovely home, a secure future. But these things are fragile. Even at their best they don't provide hope after death.

Like the people in the film *The Beach*, we cannot create the world we all want. Thousands if not millions have tried and all of them end in failure and disappointment. We must know why by now?

3. God promises that he will put it right

Read Ezekiel 36:22-38. Ezekiel is a prophet: God's spokesman. He is speaking to the Israelites exiled in Babylon. They must have thought they had finally blown it - that there was no hope left. But look at what God says. God promises to rescue his people from the nations. Look at Ezekiel 36:24. God promises to restore the land so that it will be like a new garden of Eden. Look at Ezekiel 36:30 and 35.

But God also promises a greater rescue for his people. He promises to deal with the problem of our hearts. Look at Ezekiel 36:25-27. God will deal with the problem of rebellion. He will remake us as new people.

We cannot create the world we all want - but God can. I want to ask two questions as we finish:

Why? Why will God do this? Why doesn't God give up on us? It is not because we deserve to be rescued because we don't. Instead look at Ezekiel 36:23. God will save us to show how great and how loving he is. God saves us to bring himself glory and worship.

How? The second question is how does God do it. How does he deal with our sin and with his judgment? That is what we will be looking at in our next session.