

Claremont Baptist Church
Sermon Series: Game of Thrones
Sermon: Game of Thrones 3
Date 22 March 2020

A few weeks ago, I started a sermon series titled *Game of Thrones*. The idea was to look at God's activity through the eyes of a king or a story that involves a king. We've looked at Daniel chapter 1 and it is quite interesting to see how God works through human power. We looked at its deficiencies; we looked at its deformities; and we looked at how people thrive under those types of oppressions when they are submitted to God - Daniel was an excellent example of that phenomenon.

Today we continue. The message has been tweaked and the passage changed because of the crisis that has been thrust upon South Africa and Africa – we are the latest affected by the coronavirus of the COVID-19 strand. A lot of what I have to say, within the framework of *Game of Thrones*, has to do with where we are today. I pray this is relevant, coherent and profitable to every single one of you.

Exodus 7:14-17

This passage is right in the middle of the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. The idea is to get Pharaoh to give legal recognition and permission for the Hebrew people to leave and go on their way to a promised land. Pharaoh is unwilling and at this point Moses is going to confront him and have a wordy encounter with this person who he might or might not have known in the past.

'Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. And you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed. Thus says the Lord, "By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. '

Exodus 7:14-17

I've got 3 S's for you this morning (I love my alliteration)

1. Social Distance

I've got a mock audience here today sitting at least two (2) meters apart from each other to observe the health protocols of our government: You've got to socially distance yourselves from one another. Decades ago, from the forties to the nineties, another law forced us to be socially distant based on race and class. It was a law that forbade you to be in touch with someone of such and such a color or ethnicity. It was wrong and evil and should not have been

brought into existence. This new law of social distancing has my full validation and support and should not be confused with the aforementioned law. I want you to know that in order to maintain a Godly disposition as the church, this is a law that you can, with your full conscience, get behind and obey. It might sound funny because you are invited by Jesus to join Him in the incarnation - which means coming closer; it is meeting people where they are; and it is going to people who do not deserve your presence – making yourself present so that you can assist them and put them on a journey that is Godward. So how is it that I can not only endorse but encourage you to be socially distant and isolated from the world at large? Well, without getting too technical, you know the crises that we are in: there is this coronavirus – COVID-19 - and its infection rate is scary. It is more powerful than the common flu. The idea of maintaining social distance is not so much to protect yourself, but also to protect others in your own family and beyond. Where the previous law was meant to keep people away out of social fear, a political agenda, and a whole host of fallen human traits, this new law is rooted in the very opposite: it is rooted in maintaining a healthy economy, in maintaining a stable political system, and in removing panic and fear as everyday attributes of how we experience life. So, I can endorse it and I will encourage it. And I want to go a step further: It is probably what Jesus would have wanted.

So social distancing is always the precursor to incarnationalism. Let me explain:

First let's go to our text:

'Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.'

Exodus 7:14

1.1 In this sense, allow me some preachers license and, I want to encourage you, under the social distance ethic, not to harden your heart or be stubborn and obstinate, but allow yourself to see a different point of view. Don't be one of those guys or gals that insists and say "I will not be socially distant." "I will do what I want to do." You are putting yourself and, more importantly, you are putting others at risk. So don't harden your heart - like Pharaoh.

1.2 Secondly, if social distance is the precursor to incarnation, then we will do well to do so. Jesus, in order to reincarnate himself to earth, had to start the process of social distance from the other two parts of the God head. He had to say, "Father, I can only incarnate and come close to the subjects of potential salvation if I distance myself from my eternal throne in heaven and if I remove myself from this comfort of rulership for a little while. So that in the long run, eternity might be served to those who receive the broken body and the blood." In the same way, you are called to make a temporal sacrifice of sociability right now, which is rooted in eternal senses so that the greater good of all societies, including your own, might be served. Do not be uncompassionate; do not harden your heart; do not be someone that is unreasonable but listen to the wisdom of God. Listen to the encouragement of greater preachers and Christian thinkers than I who are all asking you to remain socially isolated and distant for a while. We do not want to cause not just our own sickness - I am a steward of my own body and present and future – and we certainly don't want to be the cause of people who are older, some more fragile in terms of health and physicality, and a mere sneeze in their direction, a

mere cough in their vicinity might cause them to never ever recover. In fact, while preaching this message, my sputum is going all over the place. You should be glad you're not here this morning.

1.3 Social distance relates to compassion. You are socially isolated for a time such as this. God is in this. Do not be uncompassionate please.

2. Social solidarity

You might have read some of the literature about where we are right now. I want you to understand that our social distance is in fact a proclamation of social solidarity with those who are infected and those who could be infected. We are not staying away out of fear - there might be some who are so panicked and so fearful that they cannot minister in the name of Jesus. That was the state of a Hebrew tribe who during this encounter with Pharaoh, it took the anointing of God to rest on (a very unknown at the time) Moses, who comes from the household of Pharaoh, to distance himself from that particular family and then adopt a new identity of representation that is higher from where he comes – incarnationalism - and then say, "Let my people go!"

2.1 Christian leaders, let your people go!

Forget about the lower motivations of gathering people to hear your voice; forget about the lesser motivations and ethic that drives your thinking and your actions in saying that perhaps the church will not financially survive if they are not present. I ask you, "Where is your faith?" Do not allow those considerations to set the agenda for congregational gathering. Let your people go.

One of the most notable Christian leaders, Rick Warren, when he wrote his book *The Purpose Driven Church*, came to the conclusion that he needs to release his people and let them go. The Holy spirit is the one that moves and ebbs & flows to the very life stream of the congregational assembly, gifting them to acts of service and then empowering them to work in communities that they are in. They do not need him, as the senior pastor, to tell them what to do. They don't need his permission. They are born again, blood-washed believers who have the same Holy spirit that he does. I want to tell you, "Let your people go in the spirit of social solidarity." In other words, don't hold them in this time of crisis which is unique and might not be repeated in the next hundred years. But allow them to isolate themselves so that the greater good can be served. This is not a time for narrow interests; this is not a time when we are concerned about the organizational health of the church. This is the time to be concerned about those in south Africa who are vulnerable.

You might have never done anything for someone who is infected with HIV - and it's a shame that in South Africa HIV goes with poverty and skin color. If ever you could do something, now is the time to release your people and let them go. Because if we don't, we face a deluge of death and disease and social destruction that the world has not yet seen.

Let your people go.

2.2 God Knows How to Intervene

I also want to say a word to you based on the text. This is what it says in verse 15: *'Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. '*

There is a history of supernatural activity with which Moses goes to see the ruler. Then he says, *'And you shall say to him, 'The Lord , the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed. '*

You see, there is a social solidarity that is going to take place in the midst of social isolation - in the midst of social distancing - that you and I could never orchestrate, plan or program as Christian leaders. There is something supernatural taking place here and the supernatural staff which is the reminder that God is able, that God can and, if he wants to, he will today. When you walk with that staff, it is your testimony that God delivered you from the lion's den; It is the testimony that God delivered you in the basket floating on the river Nile - not a single reptile bit you, touched you or even breathed on you; not a single droplet of water entered your airways to destroy you, your potential or your destiny. God knows how to intervene. The social solidarity that will take place when you understand that, "I stand here today because my God has performed." And in this particular crisis, even as I respond in solidarity with many other voices, many Christian and some not, I do it with common sense. And so, we respond together and we understand that what God is busy accomplishing is beyond just 'my' narrow interest - not just as a Christian leader, but even as a worshipper.

2.3 The Church is more than what you think

What do I mean by that? You see, I am Baptist and, just by the way, I wasn't born Baptist - our theology says it's impossible. I was born in another denomination and I was the first person in my family, as far as I know, to ever become converted, saved, regenerate and then join the Baptist church - because the first time I went there I heard the preaching, felt the worship, and knew it was home. I am a convinced Baptist. And part of that convincing is our ecclesiology - the fancy word to say what we believe about the church. What we believe about the church is simply this: That the church is not the building; that the building is the least of our concerns. The church is even beyond the mass gathering of its believers or congregational worship on Sunday; the church is the company of all of the believers who are called by God, who have the Spirit of God within them, and are defined and regenerate eternal beings, adopted sons and daughters of God, and will do his bidding wherever they are.

You see, God's people are being released at this time to minister wherever they are, to receive blessing wherever they are and to show compassion wherever they are. There is a social solidarity and the ministry has the potential like never before - because the numbers have

never been what they are before - to touch this world; to impact this world. And hopefully, because of your ministry and mine, to see some people submit to Jesus as Lord and savior.

It's a marvelous opportunity.

- It is a marvelous time to show social solidarity.
- We have social distancing and it is the precursor to incarnationalism. You have to leave something so you can get near to something else. This is the process we are in.

2.4 Serve Him in the Wilderness

Also, I want you to understand that, in terms of social solidarity, the worship of which Moses speaks, when he says, "let the people go so they can go worship in the desert," that is not exactly a great goal. Can you imagine that? It is like my feelings towards camping. I just do not understand it! Invite me to a 5-star or 6-star hotel and pay for it and I'm there, but Invite me to buy a tent, be homeless for a week, build my own informal dwelling, and tell me to enjoy it? I'm not there. If that is to your liking, go for it. The point is that this is not an upgrade. This is not something that is obviously better: to go from oppression and some protection to absolutely nothing but exposure to the elements and all the wild animals that could possibly harm me, as well as the raving parties of bandits and criminals that could attack and kill me. Yet this is what Moses is saying: "Release my people so that we can go..." - worship is the key idea.

The place doesn't matter. Here's the point, brothers and sisters: It doesn't matter if you're at the CBC with a 104-year-old organ - mighty as it might be. It doesn't matter if you are in a tent, an evangelistic crusade, worshipping Jesus with way too loud music and the keyboard doesn't know when to stop. It doesn't matter if you are in the highbrow expression of orchestral maneuvers and it is so beautiful that even before Jesus is mentioned, you cry. It only matters that Jesus is at the center of your worship. The place, the context, the surroundings and the threats do not matter. I am called to worship.

My ecclesiology and my belief about the church says that the church is the people of God who are called out by salvation in an anointing and ministry, and you, ladies and gentlemen, have been released.

So, to be explicit, every person who hears this, if you are a member and attendee of Claremont Baptist Church, you are released for ministry. If you are listening this Sunday or even later, you are released for ministry. Go to your neighbor and take them some canned food if you can. Go to your neighbor and offer to pray. Phone some people you haven't heard from, connect with family members who have been distant and estranged. Minister in the name of Jesus. Get out of the normal rhythm of your life, be shaken up by Jesus, the Holy Spirit and God the father, and what He is doing right now, and allow him to use you to be the church. Worship in the desert. Worship in that wilderness.

- Social distancing for compassion because it is always the precursor to coming closer.
- Social solidarity as we are saying that in this instance, we are standing in solidarity with those who could potentially be harmed and we want to be part of the solution.

Last but not least:

3. Supernatural salvation.

'Thus says the Lord , "By this you shall know that I am the Lord : behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. '

Exodus 7:17

Could I contextualize it? We are in the time of COVID-19, a microscopic virus/organism that has the potential to stop you from breathing. It has the potential (in a country like South Africa) to bring the lives of millions to a painful end. "I am the Lord. This is how you will know me."

In times of great supernatural challenge, there is great supernatural intervention. There was no church back then, but there was a prophet who represented the future church. His name was Moses.

There is a church today. Even when Jesus said that the workers are few but the harvest is ripe, "send for the workers." The workers are many, they're just lazy. The workers are many, they're just not at their stations. The workers are many, but just huddle up in church on Sunday and remain inactive Monday to Saturday. This is an opportunity for you to be the church and supernaturally, God raises up the new Moses: The prophetic voice of the church, which is every single one of you, released to do its duty and to worship in the desert. In the place that you choose not to be. It's only for a while, but the supernatural salvation will be found here.

This is how the world out there will know that He is our God - that He is God. And He is sovereign and He is over and above all this.

I want us to know that people are being faced with their mortality; people are being faced with the possibility of their lives ending; people are being faced with those whom they love and they're wondering, "Could this be? Where is God in all of this?" That is where you come into the picture. COVID-19? "This is how you will know that I am God."

- Social distancing
- Social solidarity
- And Supernatural salvation in a time of great distress.