

“HEART FOR THE NATIONS” 10/7/18 Psalm 22:25-31

Intro: History, to a large extent, is the study of nations fighting nations, changing border lines with a victory or a loss. And so often, because of that history, people of one nation will have hatred toward people of another nation.

Whenever I have traveled to another nation, I’ve heard of why this nation doesn’t like that nation, and looking in from the outside, it makes no sense to me.

But here in the US, we have our own issues about how we view some nations...

Ah, the Nations. As I said, history has been written around these things we call nations. People have lived and died and killed for lines on a map, for national identity – people have defined themselves and others by what nation they are part of.

Today, in our nation, there is much controversy over how to view our nation, how to view other nations. It’s a hot topic, as people judge each other over what is the appropriate amount of patriotism, how our nation should relate to other nations, etc.

Whatever your convictions and opinions may be on that, let me remind us all of something critically important:

if we call ourselves Christians, that **MUST** affect how we view everything – if we call Jesus **LORD**, then how **HE** views things is what we seek to know and understand – and that includes how we view our nation and all nations.

First, if we are followers of Jesus, it means our primary allegiance is to a kingdom that is not of this world. If we get that wrong, we don’t understand the Christian faith, and we can make an idol of an earthly nation, and God has some strong feelings about that.

If faith in God means anything to us, we will seek to understand **HIS** perspective about everything.

Next week we begin our missions conference. I want it to be clear that missions conference is not just some little thing we throw on the calendar of minor significance. **NO**, missions is central to who we are, not just as Christian and **MISSIONARY** Alliance, but as followers of Jesus – missions is central to the heart of Jesus. He died for **ALL NATIONS**, not just the USA.

And I’m not done yet with the series on the life of David – so we are going to look at this issue of “the nations” – to prepare ourselves for missions conference, try to capture God’s heart, by looking at how David began to get a heart for the nations, even in his day.

So today, the central truth is this: God wants us to share his heart for the nations. What does that look like? 3 things we see in David’s writings (we see in the Psalms he authored) that we can gain from:

1. UNDERSTANDING GOD’S JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

Central to the Christian understanding of the good news is John 3:16 “For God so loved **THE WORLD** that He gave His Son” – right? He loves the **WORLD**. That’s pretty over-arching. Pretty clear. Salvation is for **EVERY** nation, every tribe, every language. Everyone. “Whoever” believes, shall not perish but have eternal life.

OK, so how can we reconcile that with some of the kinda harsh things we find in the OT that is spoken about the nations?

For example, David writes in one of his psalms: “You have rebuked the nations and destroyed the wicked; you have blotted out their names for ever and ever. Endless ruin has overtaken the enemy, you have uprooted their cities; even the memory of them has perished.” Psalm 9:5,6

Another psalm of David includes this verse: “O Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors.” Psalm 59:5

Can you see why verses like that are problematic? Some look at things like that and use them as justification for ultra-nationalism, see justification for hatred, bigotry, racism etc.

Others find no way to reconcile this with the love of God for all that is found in the NT, and just can't see how this could be the same God, from OT to NT, and they sometimes come to some strange conclusions to try to make sense of it.

So, how CAN we reconcile these kinds of verses, how can we fit the judgment of God on the nations, with a God who LOVES the nations? Are you ready for an answer? This is SO important, and really not complicated.

Let's start with what God said to Abraham, and this was just after God tested Abe by asking him to sacrifice HIS son: “...and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” Genesis 22:18

So, do you see that? God's plan from the beginning, was to make from Abraham's descendants a great nation, Israel, but the whole point was that ALL nations would be **blessed** through them. God chose Israel, not so they could hoard God's blessings and keep them for themselves while other nations stay separate from God, but God chose Israel so they could be instrumental in God's blessing coming to ALL nations. Of course we know THAT is the nation from which Jesus came, who would die to save all nations.

So this one nation, Israel, was critical for God's plan to save all nations. That's foundational. But, one complication – some nations set themselves AGAINST Israel, made it their goal to DESTROY Israel. They didn't want Israel's God, they valued their national pride more, so they wanted to extinguish Israel.

SO you see the dilemma from God's vantage point? “I love all nations, want to save them, and in order to do so, I'm going to work through THIS nation. But some of THOSE nations want to stop that plan, want to destroy the nation I want to work through. SO, I have no choice but to deal with those nations, in order to save others.”

Does that make sense? Just to illustrate it – let's say everyone in this room is in danger. They need to be saved. I care about everyone here, so in order for me to save everyone in this room, I am going to work through one person. Let's say it's Nancy – my lovely wife is who God is going to use to deliver you all! OK, so far so good.

But let's say a half dozen of you decide you don't like Nancy and want to do away with her. Would it make any sense for me to say, “Well, I like all of you, so I really don't want to do anything harsh to those who want to take Nancy out.” – that would make NO sense, and would lead to Nancy's demise and no one being saved. And it might make things very difficult for me at home.

Instead, what WOULD make sense is for me to say “I'm going to save these people, whoever will allow me to, and I'm going to use Nancy to do it, and you can go WITH me or AGAINST me, but if you go AGAINST me, try to stop me, try to do harm to Nancy, well it won't go well for you.”

That's a poor attempt, but I think you get it - why we see strong words and seemingly harsh things happening to nations – when they oppose God's plans to save. So don't let some skeptic twist it into something it isn't.

God JUDGES nations, for sure, but not because he is in a foul mood, not because He is racist or bigoted or any of that - but He judges nations that get in the way of Him SAVING nations, because THAT is His goal. Does that make sense?

2. HOW REDEMPTION APPLIES TO NATIONS

When we think of a world full of people, all loved by God, we can talk of individuals, and how God deals with individuals... but can also speak of families, villages, towns, cities, but another level, from God's vantage point, looking at this world and how to reach them, is NATIONS – people who share a geographical area, a language, a history. As I've said, through history it's one of the big ways people define themselves... – think of this fact – for so many of us in this nation, we still celebrate and identify with the nation we belonged to before coming to America – even if it was several generations back. My ancestors have been in this nation for over 150 years, but still we have some distinctive foods we eat, things we do, - we can still insult each other in German.

All this to say, national identity runs deep.

But you know how we came to be all kinds of separate nations, right? It really wasn't part of God's plan – it was a result of the sin of the human race that we became separate nations.

The Bible tells of the Tower of Babel.... story is found in Genesis 11, where people said, “Hey, let's make LOTS of bricks, build a tower to the heavens, make a name for ourselves, and not be scattered.” Talk about the height of human pride! God said, “if they keep up like this, there will be nothing that will be impossible for them” – IOW, human beings DO have great potential, but when there's pride involved, and no submission to God's authority, then that great human potential becomes a very dangerous thing. We see today, humankind can accomplish and build great things, but those great things turn to accomplish evil, and things can go very very wrong.

So God confused their speech, - suddenly everyone is speaking a different language, and God scattered them all over the earth, and thus we have different nations, languages, peoples.

So the divisions we know today of nations and languages were born out of sin, pride, rebellion. Sadly, the negative legacy has continued as nations have fought each other, racism hasn't been eradicated, the conflict born at Babel just keeps going.

BUT, God is in the process of changing all that. The KINGDOM of God, that John the Baptist announced, that Jesus kept talking about, that we become a part of when we welcome King Jesus to His rightful place on the throne of our lives – ah, that changes everything!

I find it fascinating, that the first time God caused people to speak in different languages, it was so they COULDN'T understand each other at Babel.

The next time we see God causing people to speak in different languages, it was Pentecost, Acts 2, but it was so people COULD understand each other, as people came together from different places, and they heard the good news of Jesus in their own language.

Jesus came to “reverse the curse” in SO many ways, and one of those ways is that, IN HIM, nations would no longer be scattered, but instead the nations would be brought together. Sin has torn humanity apart, the blood of Jesus brings us back together.

Redemption – the Lord buying back what the enemy has stolen – redemption applies to nations as well.

God loves ALL nations, and wants to see them come to know Him. That's His heart, and we are called to SHARE His heart.

From book of Acts to modern missions movement, followers of Jesus have received burdens for specific nations.... In Acts 16, the Apostle Paul had a vision in the night of a man from Macedonia, begging Paul to come and help them, to bring them good news. Macedonia was an ancient kingdom, then became a Roman province – but point is, God gave Paul that vision because God cared about the people of Macedonia. He wanted to redeem that place, and Paul did have great ministry there, sharing Christ planting churches, and later he wrote to some of those churches and we have those letters now that make up part of our New Testament – Philippians, for example, was written to the church in Philippi, a leading city in Macedonia.

Much more recently, Robert Jaffray, was a Canadian – his father owned the Toronto Globe newspaper, had ambitions that Robert would one day be CEO of the newspaper. Instead he heard AB Simpson preach about the lost, and he felt called to be a missionary to China. His father was so angry...., but he went, spent his life so that China would know Jesus. He also initiated work in Indonesia and the Philippines, and the CMA has had great work in those nations – and the Philippines is now SENDING missionaries – I met one such couple in Mongolia when I was there.

The point is this – Satan has a plan for nations, to keep them in darkness and bondage and for destruction of the people of every nation. But GOD has a plan to REDEEM nations, to purchase them back, to restore and bless and save. He cares very specifically about nations.

Psalms 72 is attributed to Solomon, and it is about “the king” – and as you read it, you wonder, is it about Solomon, the King? Or is it looking forward to the King of Kings, Jesus? In that psalm, we find this:

May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.
Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. (Psalm 72:17)

“All nations” blessed through the King. Redeemed. Jesus DIED to make that happen, and before he ascended to heaven he commanded this:

Therefore go and make disciples of **all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... (Matthew 28 :19)

That's where we are called to be a part of it all – in missions, in giving, in praying, in going. Redeeming the nations. Bringing them back together in one Kingdom – the Kingdom of GOD.

3. HOW NATIONS COMING TOGETHER IS A FORETASTE OF HEAVEN

If you've ever had the opportunity to worship with other nations – I mean, a large group of people from different cultures and languages – maybe even worshiped in a language other than English – if you've ever experienced that, then maybe you know why I say, the times I've had the privilege of doing so, I've been a bit surprised at the effect it's had on me. Sometimes I've gotten weepy, sometimes just felt this kind of surreal feeling – like I'm getting a literal taste of heaven on earth. If you haven't gotten to experience this, I hope you do – whether traveling to a foreign country, or attending a conference or event visited by groups of internationals – it's glorious.

When I was in Brazil, the worship at the services we were in was amazing – we had the privilege of having a worship team travel with us called “Pier 49” – very famous among the churches in Brazil. They sang Portuguese songs that I didn't understand, but watching them pouring out love to the same Lord I love.... and sometimes I'd hear them start a tune, and I'd recognize – hey, that's a song WE

sing! And they'd sing it in Portugese, the team would sing in English (Portugese has way more syllables, but they can sing really fast and fit all those extra syllables in the same line of music) – it really is a taste of heaven.

And our Juniata College international students – oh, what a blessing to have had brothers and sisters worship with us through the years from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East. Here in our church, that presence is a small taste of what God is doing on a larger scale in our world – the nations coming together in the name of Jesus.

You know, There have been many HUMAN efforts to bring the nations together – league of nations, united nations, and they have big expensive meetings, pass resolutions, but very little changes. Hearts don't change because of a paper resolution. Hearts change when they encounter the King of Kings and Lord of lords.

Hearts change when they encounter the living God, whose kingdom supersedes any national boundaries! And then we realize "If God is MY Father, and God is YOUR Father, then that makes us brother, sister – family in Christ!"

This is what David declares:

All the nations you have made
will come and worship before you, Lord;
they will bring glory to your name. Psalm 86:9

This was a prophetic prediction, because a thousand years later, John would see this:

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from **every nation**, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands." (Rev 7:9)

Yeah, if you love Jesus, we will be standing shoulder to shoulder with people from EVERY NATION, together in awe of being in the presence of our Lord. Are you ready for that? I am!

***If THIS is what God has planned for eternity, then how should we view the nations NOW???

CLOSING – I had such an amazing experience in Brazil, and in a couple weeks at missions conference I'll tell you more about it.

But so much of what made it amazing what the team I went with – it was around 100 people, and not just Americans - Team represented something like 9 nations – UK, Australia, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Slovakia, South Africa, Austria.

(IMAGE 1) Here's a pic of Lenka, a young woman from Slovakia – we sat next to each other on the bus for one of the rides, and it was so wonderful to hear what God is doing in the Catholic church she's a part of in Slovakia.... real spiritual life there!

(IMAGE 2) Here's one of man named Shannon – born in Caribbean island of Curacao, now living in Netherlands.... I'd have no idea what churches are like there, but he shared with me, and it sounded familiar – the same kinds of things I sense God wants to do here, he senses God wants to do in the Netherlands. Hmmmm

I could go on, but I shared with a number of them as we had time to talk over meals, bus rides, etc – this sense that Babel divided us into nations, this was God reversing the curse – bringing us together, walls falling, in prep for Revelation. They agreed – yeah, God has a heart for the nations, and He's sharing that heart with His children. David saw that 3,000 years ago.

SO, what about you? Do you have a heart for the nations? Do you love the nations as God does? Will you see past whatever politics or prejudices or national pride might get in the way, and see God's love for the nations? Will you pray for the nations? Will you bless people you meet from other nations? We'll be with many of them for eternity, so we might as well love them now. And it is a beautiful thing God is creating, this Kingdom of people from every nation, tribe, language – it's glorious.

We will celebrate communion in a few moments – communion, celebrating our shared faith, our connection at the foot of the cross. It is what makes us family – not just with the people in this building, but our brothers and sisters of EVERY nation as well. Let God enlarge your heart, to fill it with HIS love for the nations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much of a problem do you think it has been, that in loving our own nation, people have allowed hatred of other nations to creep in?
2. Consider Pastor James' explanation of the Old Testament judgment on nations. Is there anything you would add to it or any further questions it raises? The explanation is basically this:
 - God wants to bless all nations
 - He chose to use Israel to bring that blessing
 - Some nations chose to seek Israel's destruction, therefore God had to deal strongly with them
3. How do you think redemption applies to nations?
4. Have you ever worshiped with many people of other nations? What effect did that experience have on you?
5. What will you enjoy about the day when Revelation 7:9 is fulfilled, when it says this:
*"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from **every nation**, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands."* (Rev 7:9)