

More about God and the nations

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Now, we've got the point in Isaiah where he's talking about the nations. I thought we'd just step back and draw a breath and think about this subject of God and the nations. So, we live in an international world.

I expect you remember that you know some of these people. I think they're supposed to be the three richest men in the world. So, from left to right they are Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, and Jeff Bezos, who invented PayPal or Amazon.

Yeah, they're big, powerful people. Now then, some other well-known people who I don't recognize them at all.

I just picked this picture off Google. Anybody know who these people are? Oscars. It is the Oscars. It is the Oscars. Yes, it is the Oscars. So, I thought perhaps it was just me, but I'm sure they are famous people, big in the world of media, Hollywood, and all that sort of thing.

And I'm sure there's lots and lots of pictures of them walking down the red carpet and the women sort of posing and the guys trying to look macho.

[1:12] So, here's another picture from recently. Anybody recognize anybody on that? Yes, it's the royal wedding. And, of course, a lot of media attention on this royal family and the occasion of their wedding.

And it's a rather charming picture. Anybody know where this is? Got it in one. It is Dubai. Isn't that an amazing city?

Would you have liked to have been the architect to design that huge building? Would you have had the nerve to design such a huge building? Look at this. And that infrastructure there.

Yeah, that's Dubai. A lot of money, a lot of power. In that nation. Anybody know who this man is? Okay, somebody's recognized him.

This is Donald Trump, President of the United States of America. Anybody know who these two are? Yeah, it's the President of North... Well, what's the correct description?

[2:19] South Korea is this gentleman. And this is Kim Jun-un, is it? I'm afraid I don't know his name. I was hoping we might have a Korean person here to put me right on that.

Very much in the news, isn't it? The power play between these nations, threatening nuclear warfare, offering not to threaten nuclear warfare, all of that.

Anybody know where this is? Oh, I don't think it's... It wasn't supposed to be New York. Is it New York? It's supposed...

I think it's supposed to be Beijing, actually. I was hoping there'd be some Chinese people here who could say, oh, I've been there. But that's rather remarkable. Look at this building here.

A lot of stud work in there, I think. Amazing. It almost looks like a royal city, doesn't it?

[3:18] I think it's... I thought it was Beijing. Okay, thank you for that. And here's some people. These are fictional people. Yes.

Yeah, this is... These are the powerful people in a Netflix series about lawyers. And they are wheeler-dealing...

What's the word? Bluffing, doing deals, getting things done. And you might notice this face.

Yeah, she's married a lot. Yeah, that's Meghan Markle, who's now married to Prince Harry. And this is the lead player, who's Harvey Specter, who just goes in and clinches deals and bluffs.

It's about power. There's a lot of rude words, so I'm not recommending this. This does not constitute a recommendation. And here is the place where it all happens. The nations of the world.

[4:17] And we live in an international world of many people. Many peoples. It's a world of power and powers. There are kings in the earth. Maybe Mark Zuckerberg doesn't wear a crown, but in many ways he is a king. He has a powerful empire under him. And likewise, the other people that you saw. There's a lot about power. It's not the only thing that goes on in the world. There is glamour, like the Hollywood thing. There is beauty. And if you're a young person on Facebook or Twitter, you will have felt the pressure to present yourself as being Hollywood-like. And to strike the correct pose, to put on the correct suit or the correct makeup to be photographed. As somebody who would be a bit like one of those characters in suits or a bit like one of those people in Hollywood.

It's a world of disproportionate, hugely wealthy people and abysmally poor people. It's a world in which there is great beauty and there is great ugliness.

[5:26] It's a world in which there is much for which we should give thanks and a world of much suffering. And it's a world which in principle, there are exceptions, but in principle does not currently yield to its creator and maker.

The Bible sees the world as being in a tumult, being in confusion and rebellion against God. But one day it will be in, one day it will yield to its creator and maker.

The Bible says, one day all the kings of the earth will bow before Jesus Christ. Because there is another kingdom that will overwhelm the little kingdoms of men.

And this is the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, your kingdom come. We are praying for this kingdom in its power and glory to overwhelm all the other kingdoms. And take them into their proper position. And the good news, the new thing, the new announcement is that the king has already set this in motion.

[6:46] And he did it in a most remarkable way, which we shall look at in a moment. He did it when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. And in so doing, he set in place the measures, the provisions, the plan for what Paul calls this mystery of God.

That the nations will be part of his kingdom. And thinking in terms of Isaiah, so we're going to dip into a few places this morning.

There's the book of Isaiah being written. And it forms a place. This is supposed to be a timeline. So time is going that way. And it sits somewhere on this timeline.

And it describes things. And the timeline goes forward. It describes the temple. It describes the kingdom. It describes the king. It describes his triumphs. It describes the fruit that his people will have.

It describes the mission that his people will have. And it describes that all looking forward. And this comes to a point of explosive fulfillment.

[7:54] When all the things that are written there go pow out into the world. And the temple, which we've just been reading of, becomes the people of God.

And the mission becomes not fighting, but taking out the gospel. And the city becomes not a geographical location with bricks and stones, but a whole people that God is populating. Forming as a population for his city. And the thing that sets it going is this, the cross of Jesus Christ. And I wanted to stand back a little bit and just take a breath to see how the book of Isaiah moves us forward in anticipation of that great explosion.

What I didn't put on the diagram, I only thought of it when I was walking down, is that I should put that this explosion doesn't go nowhere. It ends up with a triumphant fulfillment, which is, for example, what the book of Revelation describes.

When every knee bows to Jesus Christ, his kingdom becomes all in all. There is no more death or suffering, but God makes everything new. Well, I didn't put that on the picture, but that's actually where it's heading.

[9:10] So let's, if you prepare to come with me, we'll just take a walk through from Old Testament into the New Testament. And we got to around about Isaiah chapter 20 was where we were last time.

And we were looking at the nation of Egypt and its links with Cush and Ethiopia and Assyria.

And the next chapters are going to say a lot about nations in various forms. So something about the nations is going to be said in chapter 13, 14.

15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and onwards until you get to chapter 39.

It's all about Israel and the nations. And I deduce from that that Isaiah thinks it's important.

[10:23] Now, I must say, as somebody who's put themselves down to preach on it, I'm a bit intimidated by this because I think, how can I conceivably present 27 chapters to keep people's interest and to say something different each time?

And I might even flunk out of it anyway. But he does think it's important, doesn't he? He's got 27 chapters talking about the nations.

And, well, their shortcomings, the promises that go to them, the way that his people are supposed to be different from the nations, things like that.

But he thinks it's important. And I remember Alec Mateer, the one-time principal of Bristol, Trinity College Bristol, saying, Dear friends, when the Bible seems to be getting boring, pay special attention because God is emphasizing something.

And I think that's a good thought, isn't it? We've got 27 chapters, and I'm slightly intimidated by them, but it does point up to us, God is saying something important.

[11:46] There's a little map of the nations that figured in Isaiah's world. If I can put it that way, that's Jerusalem, and how to deal with Egypt, how to deal with Assyria, how to deal with Babylon.

They all present different spiritual pressures, temptations, intimidation, accommodation at different periods of time. So there's a lot going on there, but God thinks it's important.

So let me say a second thing about Isaiah. Isaiah emphasizes that the nations will be judged by Israel's God for their idolatry, their pride, and their irreverent rebellion.

So there's a little cartoon of Babylon. Israel building itself up, saying that it will reach the sky.

There's a lot of pride in that.

I'm reminded of that architecture in Dubai, which seems to have a similar sort of motivation, doesn't it, to say how grand and powerful our human enterprise is.

[13:07] And what does the Bible say about the nations in the time of Isaiah? Well, largely they're left to themselves. Although these prophecies refer to them, God does not send missionaries out.

Well, there are exceptions, but doesn't send missionaries to Babylon. The only missionary I can think going to Assyria was the prophet Jonah. Yeah? He went to Nineveh, didn't he?

But largely the nations are just left to themselves. And in Acts 17:30, Paul says, in previous times, God has just not, well, it says overlooked in the NIV.

I think in the authorised version, it says God winked at. Does it mean he closed his eyes too? But anyway, he just let the nations do what the nations wanted to do.

What the nations wanted to do was to make idols. So you get things like in Isaiah 19:3, they consult the idols and the spirits of the dead.

[14:15] And if you've done foreign travel, you will perhaps have been to places where you can literally see idols, Hindu idols in Sri Lanka and in India.

a temple adorned with little figures all over.

If this was a Hindu temple, we'd have figures crawling all over the walls of the idols. And the Bible's take on this is it is a deep insult to God to make idols.

It's like if somebody made a picture of you and deliberately made your nose bigger than it is and accentuated what they thought you ought to look like, but it wasn't a faithful portrait at all.

It was insulting. And every idol is an insult to God because it says, this is what God's like. And God says, I am not like that. How dare you think I'm like that?

[15:21] What gives you the right to make up what you think I'm like? They make up idols. The nations characteristically think they are God.

So it's quoted of the king of, I think this is the king of Babylon, 1414, who says, you said, I will ascend above the tops of the clouds.

I will make myself like the most high. The tendency of the nations to big themselves up so that they think they are not accountable to anybody, but they are the top.

They rule everything. You don't actually have to be an international multimillionaire to think the same thing about yourself. When you do, well, I used to teach computer programming to children at school.

And the first thing that the child writes when you teach them how to print a message on the screen is, say, the child's name is Bob.

[16:38] Bob is great. The nations mock the Lord and attack his people.

So the army commander came up outside Jerusalem to attack it, if you remember, and said mocking things about the God of Israel and came to attack the people of God.

That's the characteristic nation view of the people of God. It's called persecution. And the Bible contains lots of examples of it in this country by God's mercy and grace for many years.

It's not been a feature of what it is to be a Christian, but I guess that in future we will have to be prepared to be mocked, insulted, maybe even have legal proceedings taken against us basically for being Christian.

But the characteristic of the nations is that they mock the Lord and attack his people. Let me say one other thing from Isaiah on the nations.

[17:55] They're important, they're sinful, but God has an amazing plan for these scruffy, arrogant losers like me and you because as we have proved, at least, well, all of us here are from different nations.

So we find things like the promise to the Egyptians, which we looked at just the other day, which I can find where it says, the Lord to the Egyptians, the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians and in that day they will know the Lord.

You could put in your own nationality. Here's an amazing thing. The Lord will make himself known to the Germans and German people will know the Lord.

The Lord will make himself known to the Ukrainian peoples! And Ukrainian people will know the Lord. The Lord will make himself known to English people.

English people will know the Lord. That's an amazing thing. All nations will flow to the house of the Lord. That's the vision at the beginning of Isaiah chapter 2.

[19:17] There's the, putting it pictorially, there's the mountain, there's the house of the Lord and all the nations flowing to it. And the constant thought in the Bible is, what have we ever done to deserve that?

It's not the promise that was made to us. The promises were made to another nation than us. And how come we get the blessing of it? How come we find that the Christ who is of Israel becomes our Christ?

How can it be that the unsearchable riches of Christ are open to us? It's grace. I mean, there's other dimensions of grace as well, but this is one of them.

You think, wow, how come that I am on the receiving end of that? I've never deserved it. God doesn't owe that to me, but that's what he's done for me.

Paul was really grateful for that ministry. We should be really grateful to be on the receiving end of it. So that was a little look into Isaiah. Let's now whoosh forwards and have a quick look at Jesus and the nations.

[20:35] Okay, so we're going to look at Isaiah and the nations, going to look at Jesus and the nations, then we're going to whoosh forward again, look at Paul and the nations. Just going to look at those briefly. So let's look at Jesus and the nations because he's on the tipping point, isn't it?

The turning point. And I'd like you to notice the huge significance of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. I haven't spelled it right.

Look, please, at Matthew's gospel, chapter 4, verse 8.

The beginning of the ministry of Jesus. There's something about the world and its glamour and its power is mentioned to Jesus.

So you could almost imagine that slideshow of the royal family and Dubai and Beijing being shown to Jesus and the person who shows it is Jesus is the devil.

[21:43] Matthew 4, verse 8. And the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour and said, all of this I will give you if you bow down and worship me.

The power of that temptation to Jesus. And I'm saying that this relation of Jesus to the kingdoms of the world is offered by Satan instead of the cross.

So there's the kingdoms of the world, there's the cross and Satan says, let's not bother with the cross. Let's do this another way. You will have these kingdoms but the condition is that you bow down and worship me.

Jesus is offered this power via not worshipping the Lord because that's his reply. It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

Jesus is not willing to take the root of power without the worship of the Lord. So there's one thing about Jesus.

[23:06] Instead of the cross Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of the world by Satan. Let's look at a second thing that Jesus from the ministry of Jesus weighing up the cross.

I should have put the text there. Matthew 28 1626 Matthew 1626 Matthew 1626 Jesus talking to his disciples about the cross in the light of the cross Jesus saying I'm going to the cross Matthew 16 verse 24 if anyone would come after me he must deny himself he must take up his cross and follow me for whoever wants to save his life will lose it whoever loses his life for me will find it what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul and Jesus mentions this whole world in the light of the cross and says what good is it to become one of the three richest men in the world what good is it to become one of the people that the paparazzi follow around because you're so beautiful and your clothes are so marvelous what good is it to be a person of power in this world if you lose your own soul that's a very probing comparison isn't it the cross versus the kingdoms of this world the wealth and splendor of this world and Jesus says what use is all that if you lose your own soul if you are not right with

God if you don't have God as your heavenly father if you don't have Jesus Christ as your savior what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul those are options for us to weigh up what good is it to have I don't know think of whatever it is that you aspire to and then weigh up would you would you have that at the cost of having Jesus as your savior or would you on the other hand say the most important thing to me is to have Jesus as my savior I don't want to lose him I don't want to put him on the back burner he's number one and if the way to follow him is to follow him in his cross then I embrace that because that is the thing that is most important that all the things of the world take second place and then let's think of the third thing about

Jesus after his resurrection so now I've gone into Matthew 28 and after his resurrection so we're thinking instead of the cross and resurrection we're thinking weighing up against the cross and the resurrection and here now after his resurrection cross and resurrection and in Matthew 28 18 Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you because I am with you always here's a thing about Jesus and the nations he says now is the time to go into all the nations now is the time to go and make disciples of the nations which is actually such a world shattering thought it doesn't say go and make disciples back in the synagogue go and remind people of their heritage in Moses he says go to those

Egyptians make disciples of them go to the people in South Africa make disciples of them go to the people in Scotland make disciples of them this is the explosive fulfillment as Jesus considers the nations there's a little picture of it and this is the time we live in and really and truly we're used to it aren't we we're used to this we sort of know this but we shouldn't be so used to it that we forget it's a remarkable thing to be able to pray as we have done this morning for Albania to be involved with Jesus Christ extending his kingdom into the hearts and lives of people in Albania is amazing this is the time we're in this is the mission we're on this is the benefit that we've received right let me take you thirdly now to the

[28:40] Apostle Paul this is a photograph of the Apostle Paul it looks like an old master doesn't it but I think it was done by a lady in New York in the style of an old master and really and truly when this goes up on the web I should take off these photographs because I have no idea what the copyright is on them let's think of Paul Philippians 3 4 to 8 let's just think for a minute of Paul as he thinks of the nations Paul was a Jew Paul was a fully paid up Jew Paul knew the old testament

scriptures the Hebrew scriptures backwards and he had so much to be proud of compared with the nations

Paul would be entitled to detest the nations and say look at you you're idolaters you're unclean you're proud you're full of all sorts of complete spiritual nonsense and rubbish and Paul could easily have detested the nations and to be proud of the things he says in Philippians 3 verses 4 and onwards he says if anyone else has reasons to put confidence in the flesh I have look at me circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew of Hebrews in regards to the law a Pharisee as for zeal persecuting the church as for legalistic righteousness faultless he says now following Jesus cross and resurrection I now discard all that and the thing I base my life on is Jesus I could be proud of my culture and heritage my morality but I discard all that to have Christ instead verse 7 whatever was to my prophet I now consider loss for the sake of Christ what is more I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Jesus Christ the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings etc and he says I could cling on to this sort of special relationship that Israel had and I could look down on the nations but actually

I take my stand not on my achievements my history my family line I take my stand on the fact that Jesus Christ died for me and rose again for me and achieved those things for me and offers himself to me and that's where I'm going to stand do you stand somewhere like that would you say that's where I stand I don't take pride in the fact that I am from a long line of I don't know Scottish chieftains pleased to be that but what I take my stand on is this that Jesus Christ died for me and rose for me that's how I live my life he repented of his self righteousness but he did still see let's see Ephesians 4 17 and 19 he would still see gentleness being the nations the thing that we should turn from so

Ephesians 4 17 and onwards he says this to Christian people who have come to belong to the promises in Christ I tell you this and testify to it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do Gentiles equals nations in the futility of their thinking they are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts having lost all sensitivity they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more you however did not come to learn Christ that way and he sees the nations there as being the exact example of all the things we've said irreverence idolatry spiritual stupidity moral ignorance

[34:08] I put teleological futility because I couldn't think of a simple word it means where's your life going nowhere ethical impurity says that's how the Gentiles think that is how the Gentiles think until they come to know Jesus Christ and when you learn Jesus Christ you learn a completely new way of thinking and living and being through him and that's what Paul would have said don't live as the nations do live in Jesus Christ and third and final thing about Paul he was amazed at God's plan to include the nations in the promises in Christ so I've now gone over to what we had read to us in Ephesians chapter 3 where he says this is the mystery that through the gospel the the gentiles the nations are heirs together with

Israel members together of one body share us together in the promise in Christ Jesus and he says this is an amazing mystery that this whole load of people through the gospel through Christ and his cross can share in the promises in Christ Jesus I think he wants us to be amazed too he says to his readers in chapter 3 verse 2 surely you've heard about that and he tells them in case they haven't heard he wants them to be impressed do you realize what my ministry is says Paul do you realize what I'm involved with it's an amazing thing and Paul serves the good news by warning and proclaiming and inviting the nations and he does so making known as he says in verse 8 the unsearchable riches of Christ he says in chapter

Ephesians 3 verse 8 although I'm less than the least of God's people this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery which for ages past was kept hidden in God who

created all things that's what he says I'm about I'm telling the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ so that was our little brief overview we looked at Isaiah and how he saw the nations and then we looked briefly at Jesus Christ and how he saw the nations and the cross and resurrection is always part of that and then we looked briefly at how this exploded outwards into such as the ministry of Paul who is knocked out by the way God is opening up the gospel to the nations so let's see there's any cash value in this so

I've got three things first of all sanctification sanctification is being made more holy and Christians ought to be interested in being made more holy and the way Paul would put it is you used to think like nations you used to be nations you used to think that way worship that way live that way when you're a Christian you unlearn that don't follow the ways of the nations if you're a Christian don't learn how to read tea leaves so that you can find out your future don't buy a book on horoscopes so that you can tell your fortune pray to the Lord get your guidance from him don't learn how to solve your problems by ignoring God's guidance on sexual activity don't learn to solve your problems through illegal drugs that's the way the nations do it solve your problems through the Lord by trusting in him and following his word and the promise to God's people is that they will be light and fruit and shine that light bear that fruit number one number two cash value evangelism the if you like the theology of the nations is an understanding which commits us to action which commits us to saying we are in on this huge plan and purpose of God to bring the gospel right across the world we obviously can't go to every nation in the world individually but we can be involved to the degree that we best degree we possibly can we make it our business to be totally on board with bringing the nations to the obedience of faith how could I be on board with that well I could pray we have church members got a little prayer diary thing and

[39:43] I think all the nations of the world referenced on that you could work through that and pray for the nations of the world could pray for specific missionaries you give some money to help the nation the gospel go forward to the nations of the world you could actually be involved in telling people the gospel actual we live in one of the nations already you could be interested in linking!

up with people of the many international nations that come across come through here evangelism is part of the cash value of that and the good news there is a good news appeal which says maybe you worked this out maybe you didn't maybe you conceivably have come along this morning or to a meeting like this thinking that Christianity is a western message for western people you might have come thinking that this message is a European message for European people or you might have thought it's for North American people but God says no it's actually for you so if you're from Hong Kong or Ukraine or Scotland or Wales God is saying actually

I sent my son for you for your ethnic group for people who come from your sort of background for people who live the way you have lived I've sent my son for you it's for you in your nationality and Jesus calls you to turn from your national sins to the king of kings the king of kings has a kingdom that will outlast and overshadow all the other kingdoms!

And let me show you the caption that really ought to be on the advertisement for suits they should be saying without you Lord Jesus I am nothing I confess my sin I turn to you the life I live I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and died for me and may his kingdom come let's sing together