

The Lord Of Nations

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, thank you for the glory of this day and for the opportunity we have to worship you, to praise you, to sing those praise, to make our prayers known to you, and to share in the business of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to all the world.

Grant that as we turn to your word, our hands may be strengthened, our hearts confirmed, and that we may find the courage to do that to which you have called us as a church.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I was talking to a friend of mine in the congregation this week who had just been to Ottawa, and in Ottawa Diocese, which is the Anglican church community around Ottawa, they were getting involved in a vote about gay rights.

And the fellow from Ottawa said, the city will vote one way and the country will vote the other way on the issue. And that's because I think we all understand that cities create their own spiritual dynamic.

If you belong to a city, you can't help but be drawn in on the life of the city. I think we're going to be reading in one of the American periodicals this week.

[1 : 50] There was a brilliant quotation which I thought was helpful. You may not. But it talked about how within the city, the political parties, or within the state, the political parties create monsters.

And one of the monsters that's been created is that Reganomics, this was the quote, Reganomics helped to create a mass upper middle class, a national culture of childless yuppies who want gay rights, bike trails, and smoke-free restaurants.

Reganomics. I like people who can distort things like that. But there's a kind of truth to it, isn't there? That you feel, in a sense, the spiritual impact of the city and somebody recognizing it and calling it for what it is. Well, the text for today, which is on page 609 in your Pew Bible, is the text for today's book.

And it has to do with two cities. And as I thought about it, I'm not sure that we belong to one city or the other, but I think it means that we live in one city and belong to the other.

[3 : 22] And I want to put those two cities in front of you in order that you will see them. The first city is in Isaiah chapter 13, verse 1 to 8.

That's the first one I want to talk about. The first city is Babylon. The second city is Zion or Jerusalem. So the first city in Isaiah chapter 13, verses 1 to 8, is a city which doesn't fare well in the life of, well, in the biblical record.

It starts out in Genesis as being a group of people who gathered themselves together and said, come let us make for ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth.

So this was, in a sense, the first organized defiance of God where people decided to gather together in a city and be able to live their own lives and create their own identity.

And that's, people have recognized all down through history that cities generally are places where you can defy the omnipotence and power and rule of God.

[5 : 10] And you can take that upon yourselves. So we create in the city gods in our own image. We take over the world as God is running it and we make new rules and regulations and run it our way so that we can, in a sense, capitalize on the things we think are important.

The city is undoubtedly humanity's greatest invention. Of all the things that humanity has done, the creation of cities is probably the greatest.

With water systems and power grids and accumulated wealth and sewage and police and art and music and festivals and tournaments, all the dynamic of a city as expressed in the Saturday Vancouver Sun, where the thousands of things that are going on in the city are put before you in

bright colors.

So you see this, the powerful dynamic of the city. And who's going to turn against that city and try and identify themselves apart from the fact that they are part of this great conglomeration which is called a city and they, by and large, rejoice in that.

But if you look at Babylon, which is, in a sense, the prototype of the city created to defy God, then you begin to get the reason why in Genesis, it's the towers of Babel are brought down.

[7 : 03] In Jeremiah, he condemns it utterly. In Revelation, Babylon is called the great whore.

And somebody was writing about whores and saying that the real damage they do is they, in a sense, they cater to whatever their customer wants.

And that the city prostituting itself by catering to the desires. Well, that's what Babylon was and what it is all the way through the scriptures.

Herodotus described the Babylon that existed in the time of Isaiah. And he says, the city stands, listen to this description and picture it in your mind.

The city stands on a broad plain, is an exact square, 120 furlongs each way, that's about 15 miles.

[8 : 15] It is surrounded in the first place by a broad and deep moat full of water, behind which rises a wall which is 80 feet thick.

And the wall itself is 200 feet high. It's like putting a whole lot of high rises together and making a wall out of it.

There's a hundred gates of brass to enter the city. The city is divided by the river Euphrates, which runs through the middle of it, providing it with water.

And the central building in one quarter of the city is the famous ziggurat, where man goes up to find God and get hold of him and God comes down and has sexual intercourse and the gods come down and have sexual intercourse with the religious high priests of the city of Babylon.

Interesting, you see, that sexuality is at the pinnacle of the highest building in the city. So you can sort of see how this whole contrivance is, in a sense, a defiance of God.

[9 : 35] So then, if you look at Isaiah chapter 13, you then can begin to see what was why Isaiah spoke against the city and what he had to say.

Look in the text on chapter 13 and verse 1, you'll see that it begins as an oracle concerning Babylon, given by, in response to a vision that Isaiah had.

Now, chapter 13 is the beginning of a whole series of oracles that Isaiah gave concerning cities and people in the world at that time.

And if you set out to read Isaiah, it's when you get into the midst of those oracles that your reading will probably founder and you'll need help. One of the things that you must insist David Short does for you before this series on Isaiah ends is give you some, a little paper outlining how to read Isaiah because it's tough reading.

And if any of you are bold enough to start at the beginning and go through to the end, you're liable to be confused by it all. So you need help.

[10 : 57] Well, this is the first of the oracles and it's declared by Isaiah to help people understand what is at the heart of the city of Babylon.

Isaiah chapter 13, verse 1, it says, raise a banner on a bare hill to rally forces, shout to them and beckon to them so that there is a banner raised and an army is being beckoned and they are being gathered on a hill overlooking Babylon.

All the wealth and all the prodigality of the great city of Babylon has, in a sense, stirred deeply the covetous desires of all the barbarian nations that surround it.

So they're moving in for the kill because they're going to take this great city and despoil it and take the riches of it away. So, the banner is raised and the barbarians are closing in as they subsequently they have done on other cities and other great civilizations.

they're gathered together. But then in verse 3, God takes control of the barbarians and says, in an NIV, it says, I have commanded my holy ones, I have assembled my warriors to carry out my wrath and to gather those who rejoice in my triumph.

[12 : 46] So God takes possession of this whole process. My holy ones, my warriors, my wrath and my triumph. So that God sees this rabble is gathering but this rabble is given a purpose because God is going to use them as the instrument of his wrath towards the people of Babylon.

Now, God gets a lot of bad press at times like this because that's not what God should be doing and that's one of the reasons that we create cities to do things the way God ought to do them but can't

and that's how we pride ourselves in what we can do.

But there they are, they are gathered and then in verse four it says, listen, you know, what I'd like you all to do now is clap your knee like that, just do it and then listen to the sound it makes, you see. Okay, and then the next thing I want you to do is rub your hands together and listen to the sound that makes. Not much, but it's there. Somewhere in the distance is this sound that people hear in verse four.

And this sound is a noise on the mountains. The sort of drums of war are heard in the distance. The approaching of a great army. Doom is moving in.

[14:18] Catastrophe is within earshot. And it's moving in on the city. And in verse four it says, the Lord is mustering an army that has come for war.

And they come from far away places, from far away lands, from the ends of the heavens. This great city of Babylon has attracted these people from all the nations of the world to move in and be the instruments of God's wrath on this country.

Now, this city. Now, the thing that I think is important that you get clear is that this city has chosen to defy God, has taken over the sort of management of its own life, and they have defied God.

And they have, therefore, the only thing they can know about God is his wrath. And God reveals his wrath in the course of history through these marching armies that come together to destroy the city.

So that the only thing this city is going to know about God is the reality of God's wrath. And in the same way that I meet many people who know only the wrath of God.

[15:56] They're angry at God, who they feel is angry at them, and they want to have nothing whatever to do with him. So on the scale of the city, the city does the same thing.

It is angry at God, and God can only make himself known to them through his wrath. That's the only thing they understand.

And so you get in verse 5, they come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens, to be the weapons of his wrath, to destroy the whole country.

And so in verse 6, it says, wail, for the day of the Lord is near. Now the day of the Lord for Babylon is different than the day of the Lord for Jerusalem, as you'll see in a few minutes.

But this is the only thing by which God can reveal himself to this defiant nation, is by a demonstration of his wrath. And he's bringing this demonstration towards them in verse 5.

[17:07] But then you see this strange thing happens in verse 7. And that is that it's not the enemy that destroys Babylon. The thing that happens to Babylon happens within the city.

Not only does it happen within the city, it happens within the people who are the citizens. It happens to them. And what it says about them in this verse 7 and following is that they are gripped by fear, terror of what is happening.

fear of them. And their hands hang limp at their side. So despite their 200 foot walls, their vast moat, the inner wall which is for final line of defense, in spite of all their military ability, the failure comes because their hands are robbed of strength, their hearts melt within them, fear takes hold of them.

Psychosomatic pain and anguish causes them to writhe like a woman in labor and they will look at each other aghast and their faces will burn with shame because they will have to acknowledge that they have put their trust in the wrong thing.

They have put their confidence in that which is not God and that they, the wrath of God coming to them is coming to a people whom they themselves recognize deeply deserve it.

[18:50] And so they look at each other and their faces burn with shame. Well, that's the story of how God dealt with Babylon.

with Babylon. Now look at the story in chapter 12, the whole of chapter 12, as to how God dealt with Jerusalem. And this is something entirely different.

And it begins with, again, the day of the Lord. And what marks the day of the Lord in the city? One of the commentators says it's helpful when you're reading Isaiah to recognize that when Isaiah refers to Jerusalem, when he refers to Zion, when he refers to the mountain, when he refers to the city, when he refers to the mount, in every instance he's referring to Jerusalem.

Remember last week we talked about Jerusalem as the mountain. So, in the city there is praise for the Lord.

Now you see, the interesting thing about that is that praise for the Lord is recognized universally by Christian theologians to be the fundamental activity of the human species.

[20 : 21] That's what we're here for, to give praise to the Lord. So what's happening in Jerusalem is exactly what is meant to be happening in all the earth?

That praise will be given to the God who has created us, the Lord God almighty. The ones, you see, and this is the contrast that you've got to get here.

Babylon can only know the wrath of God which inspires fear within them. Jerusalem is given to know the righteousness of God which inspires praise within them.

So you see the fundamental difference between the two cities. And it goes on to say, the anger has turned away, thy anger.

Comfort has been given. So you see what has happened and in these verses he's talking about to the individual citizen of the city of Jerusalem what has happened is a conversion has taken place.

[21 : 29] the anger that people have towards God and the anger God has towards people that's been taken away. The anger has turned away it says.

And instead of exhibiting the wrath of God, God is able to give comfort. And you see the point of that is what terror did for people was to leave their hands hanging limply at their sides to melt their hearts to terrorize them completely.

That's what happened. But now when people see the righteousness of God then they are comforted or they are made strong.

Their hands are given strength. Their hearts are strengthened because of the comfort given. And the God who is spoken of is the God of my salvation.

That the person has come to know and in a personal way put their trust and confidence in God. God is not known to them primarily by his wrath.

[22 : 44] He's known to them by his righteousness that he was revealed. So when he comes, when he recognizes that God is my salvation, then these fundamental changes take place in his life, of which Gene Begg spoke in the Children's Focus.

The changes are in verse 2, I will trust, I will not be afraid, the Lord is my strength, the Lord is my song, the Lord has become my salvation.

Not just salvation, but my salvation, my strength, my song. Those all belong to me.

Life is a gathering of strength, not the dissipating effect of weakness. And all this comes together.

Now, in verse 3, what happens is the individual has come to this experience.

Now, this experience is thought to go back to Isaiah's own experience of conversion. The point at which when God had revealed himself to him in his holiness and his righteousness, Isaiah had said, I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

[24 : 08] That was the point of conversion for Isaiah. man. And it's the point of conversion for us when we recognize, I am an angry man and I live in the midst of an angry people.

I am an arrogant man and I live in the midst of an arrogant people. I am an immoral man and I live in the midst of an immoral people. All these things become our personal consciousness as we in a sense encounter God.

And that's when the anger is put away and we recognize God as the God who is my salvation, the one in whom I will trust, the one of whom I will not be afraid, the one who is my strength and my song and has become my salvation.

So that's the resource that I have found in turning to God. And then in verse 3 what it says is drawing water from the wells of salvation with joy because you have found in God a resource which can never be exhaustive, the wells of salvation and that will draw water to bring salvation to the whole people of the world.

And you can have this confidence and you can go out to a world that is parched and dry and desert and say the water from the wells of salvation is available to you all that you want and the more of it you take the more of it is available to you and that's what he rejoices in in verse 3 in that realization we have a house over on main island and we have a well and Fran does the gardening and when she turns on the hose I feel with anxiety that the well is going to go dry but that's not this well this well is one where there is an infinite amount of resource that the water is there this is God's delight to provide this well of salvation and it is our joy to draw on it so verse 4 goes on to say there is reason then to give thanks to the Lord that is to praise him to call on his name that is to pray to him to make known among the nations what he has done that is to proclaim the greatness of God you

see people already know but because the world already knows about the wrath of God through its obstinate

[26 : 58] I mean I can't understand why the Ethiopians have to bomb the Eritrea I cannot understand why the Pakistanis have to bomb the Indian people I cannot understand it and I mean they've learned that from the West I know and they think those are the marks of prosperity and the marks of power but they're not the thing that needs to be done the heart of the life of the people is to be a praise for God to give thanks to him to call on his name and to proclaim the reality of the well of salvation which is available to them in all their need you see that's people think that maybe in that well there are drugs that will satisfy us or maybe there is money but this is God's healing whole making purpose in our lives that is provided for us so that the basis of our life becomes to praise him to pray to him and to proclaim what he has done and this is this is the true work of globalization somebody wrote in the in the

I mean capitalism seems to be going to globalize the world but in the Vancouver Sun somebody wrote capitalism is not a philosophy it's merely a tool it is utterly and ruthlessly amoral it cares for nothing but efficiency it is a jealous God it is the implacable enemy of inefficient institutions that solicit rival loyalties such as the family the community religion and the and the nation state well you see how if we have that we have something to proclaim about the eternal purpose of a righteous God a righteous God who has set up before us if you remember the stump from which the shoot will come

I gotta make sure I remember these I hope you do there is the stump there is the leader there is the mountain there is the time there is the remnant and there is the highway and all those are what God has provided so that all the nations will from their various cities come to the mountain acknowledge the leader raise a banner to draw people at a time when the Lord is going to reveal his glory and a remnant from all the nations is there in order to lead the people of those nations to the mountain and God is going to prepare a highway to bring them to that mountain well that's that's what God has done Isaiah told us all that in chapter 11 and so he says this is his final picture of the city which comes in verse 5 and 6 sing to the

Lord for he has done glorious things let this be known to all the world shout aloud and sing for joy people of Zion all the people of the city for great among you is the holy one of Israel and so you get the two cities you get the one city that knows only the wrath of God and you get the other city that knows in the midst of them the presence of the holy one of Israel and people respond to wrath with wrath people respond to the presence of God with praise prayer and proclamation and you see that's that's what Isaiah told us and that's what came to fulfill when Jesus came to Jerusalem and said

Jerusalem Jerusalem if you only knew what belongs to you and that's how Isaiah says it I guess to us this morning he says if you only knew what belonged to you you may be expert in knowing the reality of the rock of God but if you only knew what belonged to you of the God of righteousness that has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ then your heart would be filled with praise and with prayer and the burning desire of your life would be to proclaim with joy the well of salvation that is opened for us through faith in God through Jesus Christ Amen