

The God Who is Over the Nations

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, everybody. Let me add my welcome to Jordan's. My name is Aaron. If you don't know me, if you're new here this evening, come and say hi at the end. I'd love to meet you. Well, you've heard the passage read. So what do we have here? Well, we have an oracle of judgment against a place called Tyre, a place that most of you probably have never heard of.

So on this cold Vancouver night with plenty of things on your mind, what do you care about this naughty, ancient city? Well, first, let me give you some context, just a bit of background here.

If you've been with us from the beginning of the series, you'll know that Ezekiel is one of a few thousand Jewish people who have been kidnapped from their homeland, Jerusalem, and taken to Babylon.

And the first 24 chapters of Ezekiel, it's a book of 48 chapters, the first 28 chapters are about why God allowed that to happen. And one of the last things in chapter 24, one of the last things in that chapter is, these are 24 chapters of judgment against the Hebrew people. There's this prediction from Ezekiel that a messenger would come and say, Jerusalem has fallen. Now, instead of like just confirming that straight away, like 24 prediction, somebody's going to come and say, Jerusalem has fallen, instead of chapter 25 saying, oh, there's a messenger, he's got something to say, you know.

They don't do that. The exiles have to wait until chapter 33 when a messenger does turn up and says, oh, it's all over, Jerusalem has been decimated. So what you have in the book structurally is you have 24 chapters of judgment against Israel that ends with a little prediction. Chapter 33, the fulfillment of that prediction, and then to chapter 48, it's all hope. It's lovely, it's lovely. Hope, remade world, fantastic stuff.

[1 : 5 6] But in the middle, into that gap, 25 to 32, you've got this portfolio of oracles against the foreign nations that kind of surround Jerusalem, that have been opposed to Jerusalem. So that's the context. Now, a good question to ask is, what's wrong with this place tight exactly?

I mean, it's just kind of some random old city, right? What exactly did this place do to deserve God's judgment? Well, it's a coastal city. It's on an important trade route, and that's fine. They're in a really good place as a city. I mean, a great spot. They were beautiful, it says in the passage, like the Garden of Eden in verse 13. In verse 11, it says, you are the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and beauty. Very clever, according to verse 5.

And with that cleverness, they could make lots and lots of money, and that's all fine, good for them. So, you know, they had a lot going for them as a city. But it's a problem when you have good things, sometimes. Our hearts are so slippery, we get given great gifts, and they can become sources of pride. And this is what happened to Tyre. Verse 1, your heart is proud. Verse 5, your heart became proud in your wealth. Verse 17, your heart is proud because of your beauty. Folks, pride is an awful thing. Pride says this. It says, you know, we can take all the credit for all the good things in our life. It says, we're competent to run our own lives. It says, we are so good, in fact, that we can develop a sense of self-worth and purpose in our life all without God. Pride says, I'm the center of my own universe.

And when we do that, what are we saying? We're saying, I am my own God. And that's exactly what Tyre did. You look at verse 2 there. The word of the Lord came to me, son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, thus says the Lord God, because your heart is proud and you have said, I am a God, I sit on the seat of the gods in the heart of the seas. And then there's this great kind of rebuke. It's just really sort of direct. Yet you are but a man. You are no God. Though you make your heart like the heart of a God. You think you're a God, but you're just like some dude. You're just like a guy. You're just like a city. You're just like some random little city. You're not a God. And you might think, well, what's wrong with that? So they're a little bit deluded. They're a little bit kind of, you know. Is that so bad? Well, when you think you're your own God, you won't really be too bothered about the real God, would you? I mean, if you're your own God, you've got a God. It's you.

Why bother about the other God, the real one? You won't be thinking about the fact that there's a real God who you are accountable to. This is the big problem here. Beginning of chapter 26, if you're just going to flick back a few pages, have a look at verse 2 there. Verse 26, 27, 28 are all about judgment on Tyre, but we're mostly going to focus on 28. But I'll just pop back to these earlier chapters a little bit. Verse 2 there.

[5 : 24] Son of man, because Tyre said concerning Jerusalem, aha, the gate of the peoples is broken. It is swung open to me. I shall be replenished. That's Tyre saying. I shall be replenished.

Now that she is laid waste. She is Jerusalem. She's laid waste. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against you, O Tyre. This is, you don't want God against you, as my hot tip for the evening, right? You don't want God against you. And why is God against these people here? So Tyre hears that Jerusalem's going down. And what do they think? What's their response to that? Is it, oh, it's really tough, isn't it? You know? No. Is it, let's take up an offering for them? No, of course not. What is it? It's, it's, it's, is it, is it, goodness, there's a God. There's a real God. We need to get our act together. There's a holy God in charge of everything. We need to, we need to sort ourselves out here. No, it's not that. They say, we shall be replenished. Jerusalem's gone down. We shall be replenished.

In other words, they're thinking purely in economic terms. They think of Jerusalem as their economic competitor. And with them gone, it's boom time for us. That is their sole reaction to this. Pride has blinded them to the fact that there is a real God they're accountable to and has corrupted their hearts with such an awful response to Jerusalem being judged.

Now, folks, I hope you take this idea away with you and pray about it. Because pride is such an awful thing. Pride is like the carbon monoxide of sin. It causes the, it's like the slow, uh, silent death of our hearts. Pride says, I matter the most. So I will do what I need to do to maximize my sense of fulfillment, my joy, my wealth, my beauty. But instead of giving you life, pride just leads to sin. That leads to death, spiritual death. Now, I say sin here because pride just isn't a bad attitude. What we have in these passages is not just a city with a really poor attitude. Their wrong thinking, their corrupted hearts lead to a corrupted way of doing life. Verse 16, in the abundance of your trade, you are filled with violence.

And verse 18, it talks about the unrighteousness of their trade. At the heart of their sinful actions was pride. Proud hearts are not, it's not just a bad attitude. It's not thinking, I'm pretty great, but it doesn't really affect anyone. No, it corrupts the way we, we operate in the world. Now, at this point, if we had time, I would do a fairly decent excursus about the marketplace and what this has to say about the marketplace. Uh, but we don't have time, but I will, I will, I will talk anyway. Uh, the, if you did like a really careful reading of this, God is calling the city to account, not because they were, um, in terms of, what's how sin presented itself in the life of the city. It wasn't like they were violent.

[8 : 50] It wasn't like killing people. Their, their sin was kind of in the way they did business. God calls Taya to account because of their dodgy business practices.

It matters to God how businesses are run, how ethically they're run. It should matter to you. How you run your own business if you're a business person, who you choose to do business with, who you choose to buy things from. It matters to God how the marketplace is run. And we're not just talking about, well, that makes sense, you know, world vision, Christian places should do. No, any, this is just some random pagan nation that was doing dodgy business and God called them to account.

That would be a good sermon to preach, I think, if I had time. Okay, next question. Next question. So, so we have the city that is filled with pride. It corrupts them. Uh, next question. What is God's response to pride here? Well, we can see it in verse six, seven, and eight. It's judgment. Therefore, verse six, therefore says the Lord God, because you make your heart like the heart of a God. Therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations, and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. They shall thrust you down into the pit and you shall die the death of the slain and the heart of the seas. It's a small sample of the, of the judgment in this passage. It's pretty, it's pretty, it's pretty full on. Now you may ask here, let's say you're sort of new to the Christian thing. And you might ask, goodness, that just sounds so brutal. Like why, God, why not just let it go? I mean, why do you care about bringing justice to this forgettable little ancient country here? Why bring justice to anybody, an individual? Why must there be judgment? Why can't you let it go?

Why can't you just love people like, like, you know, like the dude with the long hair and the paintings and just love, just, just get on with just love, cuddles, cuddles. Why judgment? What's going on here? It doesn't make any sense. I think judgment is one of those things that perhaps some of us would prefer not to talk about because it's a bit unsavory. It doesn't sit well with modern sort of sensibilities. It's a bit off-putting for new people, perhaps. Well, we can't really avoid it in Ezekiel.

It's a major concern of the passage. It's a major concern of the whole book. So let me say, let me say four things about judgment. And this is more speaking topically about judgment and wrath. First, there is no gospel without judgment.

[11 : 52] Look, if we don't talk about God's real anger against sin and God's wrath and God's judgment, we lose the bad news, right? That's the bad news. If we lose the bad news, we lose the good news of the gospel. We lose the gospel because if we lose the bad news, we're not saved from anything.

Christianity is reduced to just like, you know, like, like, be nice or something. Give some money to some stuff or something. Just be nice, you know? That's not Christianity.

Christianity is not about being good so God will like you. That bus, that bus left the station in your life a long time ago.

You know, you'll never be good enough. It's too late now to try and play catch-up. So Christianity is not trusting your own goodness. It's trusting that Jesus lived the life that you couldn't live and took the judgment of God on himself. That's what Christianity is.

So you won't realize how good the good news is without knowing what you've been saved from. Folks, what do you say? When you say that word saved, yeah, I love that word saved. What does that word mean? You're saved from God's wrath. You're saved from God's judgment.

[13:12] There's no gospel without understanding judgment. Second thing I want to say, judgment. There's no eternal hope without judgment. If we lose the idea of God's judgment, we live hopelessly.

God's plan is to make a people for himself, for that to happen in a remade world, where God will make all things new, wipe away every tear. It's a beautiful hope that we have. It's a wonderful, sustaining hope we have. Let me read from Revelation 21. You probably, you know this passage.

Then I saw a new heaven, a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. The sea was a picture of chaos, okay? And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for a husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore. For the former things have passed away.

Doesn't that sound wonderful? Don't we want that? But it can't happen unless God judges and destroys evil. There's not going to be a little pocket of goodness. We're not going to live in this holy biosphere with just madness around us, okay? There is going to be a total destruction of evil, and that's something that comes across very, very plainly in Ezekiel 28. It's the total annihilation of Tyre. Verse 4, let me read it to you. They shall destroy the walls of Tyre, break down their towers, and scrape her soil from her to make her bare rock. That's a picture of nothingness left, right?

Verse 14, I will make you a bare rock. You should be a place for spreading of the nets. You shall never be rebuilt, for I am the Lord. I have spoken, declares the Lord God. Folks, you can visit Tyre today.

[15:08] It's in Lebanon, I think. It's on the coast still. But what's it famous for? Ruins. You go there to see a city that's no longer there, basically. God was good on his word.

So God's judgment is part of the reason Christians have hope. Bringing you back to the passage here, when God acts against Tyre, he's actually acting for Israel.

He's protecting his chosen people from this enemy. That's what the last part of chapter 28 is about, in verse 24. For the house of Israel, and for the house of Israel, there shall be no more a briar or prick or a thorn to hurt them among all their neighbors, who have treated them with contempt.

They all know that I'm the Lord God. This little episode with Tyre here is a small picture, a small localized example of what God will do for the whole earth.

And as hard and as heavy as it sounds, it's our hope that God will destroy evil. Third thing I'll say about judgment, love is behind it.

[16:32] God judges and hates sin not because he has an anger problem, but because of his love. People ask, what kind of God is filled with wrath? Well, look, any loving person is filled with wrath. In a book called Hope Has Its Reasons, Becky Pippert writes, Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships.

Do we respond with a benign tolerance as we might towards strangers? Far from it. Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is. And the final form of hate is indifference.

Then she quotes somebody else. She says, Human love here offers a true analogy. The more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him, the drunkard, the liar, the traitor. And she concludes this, If I, a flawed, narcissistic, sinful woman, can feel this much pain and anger over someone's condition, how much more morally perfect God who made them.

God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer of sin, which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.

Behind this judgment is great love. I'll say one more very small thing. First summary. No gospel without judgment. No hope without judgment. No love without judgment.

[17 : 54] Lastly, a very small thing. One more thing about judgment. The phrase, They shall know that I am God, is mentioned a number of times in the passage. And it's mostly sort of connected to the judgment here. And we don't have time to talk about it, but clearly I'm going to for just 20 seconds here.

One of the things this judgment would have conveyed to the countries near it is this. There is a God. He is real. He is holy. He's not someone to be played with.

He's not someone to be messed with. God's judgment is one of the ways he moves his glory forward, which is a nice way of leading to my final point of this passage.

Okay. So far I've talked about a warning against pride. How corrupting it is. And the rightness and necessity of God's judgment. Lastly, the other thing, when you read this passage, it kind of jumps out, is God is real, and he's in charge.

Now the official way of saying that is God is sovereign. Think about the passage. God's not talking about judging, you know, like a burglar who stole your TV or something.

[19 : 03] He's judging a whole country. He's laying waste to a nation. You would have noticed a lot of Garden of Eden imagery in the passage, and there's a lot to say about that.

In the simplest terms, it's a parallel here of an incredible fall from grace. Adam and Eve were given amazing gifts, and a job, and a purpose, but they rejected it.

In the same way, this country Tyre was given great gifts. We read about them, beauty, wealth, wisdom, but instead of fulfilling God's charge, they trusted in themselves, which led to sin, led to violence, led to corruption.

So God judges. Now how does he judge? He judges by sending foreign nations to take over the place. First was Babylon, and a couple of hundred years later, Alexander the Great finished off the job.

You see what I'm saying here? Nations are accountable to God. Whole nations. I find this very comforting. When I think about the world, and just the grisly place it is right now, and corruption on a national level that devastates people, I want to despair.

[20 : 13] But I'm comforted by the knowledge that God is sovereign, and these countries will be held accountable, and if it pleases God, he can use other nations to bring that justice.

In this example of Tyre, Babylon was the sword in God's hand. And you might think, goodness, that's not very fair. Is it? Can he do that? Is he allowed to do that?

Of course he's allowed to do that. He's allowed to do that because everything belongs to God. Psalm 24. The earth is the Lord, and the fullness thereof, the world, and all those who dwell therein.

For he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers. God can raise up nations, and bring them down as he sees fit. So we can advocate for our government to punish dodgy countries.

That's a good thing to do. And we can do that, though, without despairing when it fails to make any difference. Because God is sovereign, and he holds nations to account, and there will be a reckoning, and there will be justice.

[21 : 21] Let me wrap it up here. Let me wrap it up. Okay. The sin of Tyre was pride. Pride is corrupting, and pride is empty.

Your heart, taking this down to an individual level, your heart, my heart, was designed to be filled with God. And we fill it with such small things.

And these small things rattle around in this very large space, just kind of making annoying noises, distracting us, you know.

And I see it in my life sometimes. If I'm having, like, existential crisis, you know, like sort of feeling a bit useless, or a bit lame, or, like, not a good husband, or not a good father, or a terrible pastor, or pale, or something, I don't know.

If, you know, if I'm just sort of feeling just a bit useless, right? You know this experience, right? Like, if I feel about, what do I do? Instead of leaning into God, my temptation is to, is to go after trivial pursuits.

[22 : 33] Not the game, but just actual trivial pursuits, right? So I will find something and just really get into it. Um, it has been in the past building things, renovating things.

It is currently obscure French mopeds. I'll spend hours researching obscure French mopeds, right? What am I doing?

What am I doing? I'm actually trying to make myself feel better. Like, I'm trying to feel like I'm an expert on something. This is an example of, it's a silly example, but it's not a bad example, actually, of this massive space in my heart that I should be filling with God.

And I'm just, you know, like, trying to fill it with pretending I'm an expert in something. Like, filling it with such a silly little thing. Such a small thing.

Such a distracting thing. When what I should be doing is leaning into God and finding my sense of self-purpose and my self-worth in Him. And not trivializing my life away.

[23 : 36] That's pride, you know. It's just pride. It's me thinking I can give myself purpose without God. The last thing, is God rightfully and justly judges Tyre for their pride.

This is not a random act. It's so He could, so He would be known amongst the nations. Known for His wrath against Tyre, He's a holy God, but also known for His great mercy for His chosen people.

Pray, pray that your life would make God known for His mercy in your life. And pray that He would be your central passion and you wouldn't spend your life trivializing it away.

Trusting in the good things that God has given you. Perhaps it's your beauty. Perhaps it's your power or wealth. Perhaps it's your talents. Make God fill up that space.

Amen.