

The Gospel & Glory of the Nations

Acts 17:26-31

"And He made from one man every nations of mankind to live on the face of the earth...that they should seek God..."

Introduction: With commitments come obligations, actually playing out the commitments in life. These obligations are not negative or duty filled if you love what you committed to, but can feel burdensome if not. Take, for instance, a gym membership. Great investment of money if you put in the time, obligating yourself to actually use what you have access to (I'm obviously speaking hypothetically because of Covid!), but terrible waste of money if you commit money but not action.

Erin and I are at this beautiful level of our marriage where we can be honest about presents, particularly regarding birthday and Christmas (we'll teach a class about marriage and holidays someday). For a recent birthday the girls and I went shopping and we picked out some Fall decor (my wife's love language) and then decided on a kitchen appliance (already in dangerous waters). We bought her an Air Fryer since one of us (will remain nameless) remembered hearing Erin talk about it once. She opened it, thanked us graciously, contemplated whether she'd actually use said fryer as well as store such a contraption, and decided to return it and buy clothes instead. We were ALL happy with that decision!

The gospel demands a commitment. It is not that we make an independent decision for God, but *because* He chose, called, redeemed, purchased, reconciled, and restored us through His substitution on the cross, becoming sin for us as God poured out His wrath, and giving us His righteousness so that we could now obey. When we believe by grace through faith, repent of our sin, and turn to righteousness, we **commit our very lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ**. The gospel demands that we ***no longer see life through the lens of SELF***, but rather through the view of God and others. Life is no longer about us, it is about the glory of God and making much of Christ.

One **distinctive** in our life with Christ is having a holistic, Biblical view of **the nations**. We are actually called to do **CROSS CULTURAL** ministry, since the gospel has no borders and ethnic limitation. With so much fear, confusion, anger, and violence going on around us in terms of **ethnicities**, it is even more important for every believer to think Biblically and act rightly. When Paul reasoned with the intellectuals at the **Areopagus in Athens**, he made this statement concerning their gods, views of themselves, and salvation:

*"And He made from **one man every nation of mankind** to live on the all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, **that they should seek God**, and perhaps **feel their way toward Him and find Him** Yet He is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In Him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, 'for we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. **The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all people everywhere to repent**, because He has fixed a day on which **He will judge the world** in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this he has **given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.**"*

There is much here but as it pertains to our mission and the nations, let's look at a few:

1. All nations come from one man - Paul was very clear that all nations and people groups throughout the entire world can trace their origins to one man ---- Adam ---- and though we know what people mean when they use the term "racist" (looking down on or treating differently because of someone's external color or background), all of humanity is part of the "human race", coming from Adam, distinct from animals, made in God's image.

2. All nations are saved by one Man - God desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) and seek after Him, to know Him and worship Him. However, we know that no one seeks after God (Rom. 3:10-11) and it takes the work of One man, Jesus Christ, to undo and redeem the work caused by one man in Adam.

3. All nations, everywhere, are called to Repent - All nations are called the same way to salvation because of the same reason: **sin and rebellion against God**. In God, there is NO PARTIALITY at this point (Acts 10:34-35; 11:12). Repentance is needed because judgment is fixed and sure, and the **assurance of that** is known because Jesus Himself rose from the dead, which not only sealed our salvation but assured judgment.

Now, if all of that is true, what are the implications and questions we need answered:

What do we mean when we say "NATIONS"?

Let's do a quick run through of the Bible, shall we? God called Adam and Eve to "*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.*" (Gen. 1:28). Fast forward several thousands of years and this happened, but "**every intention of the thoughts of mans heart was only evil continually**" (Gen. 6:5), so God sent a universal Flood to destroy all humanity except a remnant on a floating barge in Noah's family. Upon leaving the Ark, God once again reiterated His desire "**to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.**" (Gen. 8:17, 9:1, 9:7). As they did this, they began to disperse (Gen. 9:19) and congregate in certain geographic locations, i.e, coastlands for Japheth's family, and each had their own language, clan, and divided into **nations** (Gen. 10:5). This happened by force when Ham's family tried to consolidate in the land of Shinar (or Babylon), rebelling against God's decree and consequentially being forcibly dispersed and confusing even the languages of clans and nations.

So God's plan was to have mankind **fill the earth, spread His glory, and praise His name** as mankind enjoyed all that God had for them on the earth. **Psalm 96:3 and 10 say** "*Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all peoples!...say among the NATIONS, 'The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity.'*" In fact, as we get a glimpse into **heaven** in the book of Revelation, we see that God "*ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*, and you have made them a kingdom of priests of our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9-10; 14:6-7). God's **plan** included a people for His own possession that was made up of all languages, color, geographic area, and people group.

1. Diversity of language, culture, people group and color is God's design, so it is beautiful - Heaven will have distinctiveness in the object of worship, and though were dressed in the same redeemed robes (Rev. 7:9), they maintained their given distinctions.

2. All people line or group up around specific cultural distinctive - Immigrants to a new area will find people who speak the same language to start. Sometimes it will be around a cultural community like

those who came to America in the early 1800's from Ireland and found Irish communities. In Africa, it is not national but **tribal lines** that unite and separate. In India, there is a distinct difference between the climate and even cooking habits of those in the North and South. Being an "American" in another country signals something to those around. But often these distinctions are not drawn with clear lines, as a place like Southern California has a mixture of languages, backgrounds, points and time of immigration, and blending of culture within families.

3. Distinctions are glorious, but create difficulties - Because cultural distinctive can create unity among like minded people, it can also create tension or conflict. This happens in marriage, communities, churches, and countries. Think about something as simple as **marriage**, where two people love and commit to each other, but have to blend together cultural backgrounds ("*this is how our family did it*"), ways of thinking (men and women think differently), and economic expectations to name a few. And marriage has clear lines of roles. When those lines are more blurry in other relationships, it gets more difficult.

Why are there so many problems among nations?

Once Adam sinned, mankind has been plunged into the same sin. Adams son killed his brother. Murder and revenge became an early poem from a husband to wives (see Gen. 4:23-24). The Tower of Babel showed that the earliest of mankind **understood the complications** of spreading out, and instead of being obedient, they tried to carve their own path in an godless way. This is exactly what people are doing today when they go against God's design in marriage, gender, and sexuality. By the time we get to **Genesis 14**, we have kings and kingdoms **making war on each other**, drawing alliances, and strengthening land holdings. The Old Testament is full of war, brothers against brothers like Israel vs. Judah, and cousins against cousin like Edom and Israel. In the New Testament we see the stark hatred of the Jewish nation vs. all others (they did not like the goyim - those who were non-Jewish), but particularly against the half-breeds known as **Samaritans**. In fact, the New Testament is clear that until the very end of this world, "**nation will rise up against nation, kingdom against kingdom.**"(Matt. 24:7)

Because it is built into the reality of sinful humanity and the reality of nations, cultural differences, languages, and physical appearances, there will ALWAYS be judgment, anger, schisms, and injustice done through partiality on this earth. Today in China a group called the **Uighurs** (wee-grz), a group of Uzbek Mongols in the North are being rounded up and persecuted (by the hundreds of thousands) simply because they have different religious backgrounds and looks than others in China.¹

The **problem we have** right now is how our world looks for solutions apart from a complete yielding to God (which is ALWAYS THE PROBLEM, folks). The world of rioting and violence against problems, both **real and perceived**, is based on Atheistic notions that those in power are oppressive and must be removed since people believe **they know better and will do better, misunderstanding the sinful nature of mankind and Who is ultimately in control!** They are willing to rebel against God's design of government, family, responsibility, and especially a devoted worship of the Creator through Jesus Christ. In our world's philosophy that is on display every day, there is no possible redemption, no forgiveness, and no idea as seeing all people as made in God's image. There is a perception that those that have should give to those who have not, regardless of *why* each group may be in that situation. This philosophy is **unbiblical, anti-gospel, and worldly**, thus should be called out, exposed, and rejected (2 Cor. 10:4-5; Col. 2:6-8). But what should we do instead?

¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/uighurs-china/>

How do nations fit into God's Plan? What is His Cross-cultural plan?

First, we must understand what God has for **US** in terms of the nations. Remember that God called Israel in the OT as a **light to the Gentiles** (Isa. 42:6) and a light to the **nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth** (Isa. 49:6). This was made manifest by Paul in **Acts 13:47-48** as Gentiles were added to the Church in the **SAME WAY** as Jewish believers, making them equal in standing rather than second class proselytes. Jesus had left a **MANDATE** to make disciples of **ALL NATIONS** and to baptize and teach them to follow Jesus. This means that we not only **SEND to the nations but recognize the nations coming to us!** The makeup of the church is always intended to be **cross cultural**, not of one cultural group.

Men, women, slaves, free, rich, poor, black, white, Latino, immigrant, barbarian, Jewish, Scythian, Greek, professional, bi-racial, intellectual, blue-collar, big, small, fatherless, widow, orphan, divorced, single, married, barren or infertile, with kids walking with the Lord or prodigals, college educated, those with clear ethnic lines or those that don't even know all the combinations, those with great relationships with parents and those who were abandoned, raised in church or raised on the street, those who struggle with addiction and those who never have, the church is made up of **redeemed humanity through Jesus Christ, and that fact is greater than anything that would divided us.**

"The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." Eph. 3:6

"Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Sythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all." Col. 3:11, cf. Gal. 3:28

It is this make-up of a church that is a light to the world, that reaches the nations, and shows the distinctive LOVE that cannot be found in the world. But what does that love look like? How do we continue to show love and cross cultural barriers to show the world there can be true unity in the midst of vast diversity?

What would God have us do considering the nations?

1. Love demands time & understanding -- One of hardest things we each deal with is drawing conclusions about people we do not know or have any relationship with. We observe them from afar or even hear something they said and form a strong opinion about them. One of the reasons **I love God's church** is that we all have a story and unique way that God brought us to this moment. To truly know and love people hear means we must take **time to listen** to their background, testimony, and even present trials. I'm convinced that it's what all people need, most want, and few actually do. Since I personally do not know what it's like to think in Spanish like my friend Elio, to be a 6'8' black man like my friend Lavar, or to grow up without a father like so many, it demands that I take the time to understand the good and the hard, empathize with those areas that are not right, and to learn how best to care and encourage. We cannot apologize for any good thing God has given us, but we know that God gives both good and hard, and we can strive to understand those with each other.

2. Love is committed to humility - How each of was raised is neither categorically right or wrong, but they were certainly different. When we believe that who we are or how we chose to do things is **RIGHT**, it sets us at odds with others and puts us in a place of wrongful **condescension**. Humility says that I view others as having value greater than myself (Phil. 2:3-4), regardless of economics, background, or color of skin. Humility and graciousness also must be shown when well-intentioned but awkward comments are

made that can be interpreted as offensive. Remember, the gospel frees us from taking ourselves too seriously, since we take all that Christ has commanded and loving others as absolutely serious.

3. Love moves toward - Difference divide. The gospel unites. This church will be effective when we stop **assuming and starting moving toward each other**, not allowing age, marital status, time in the church, or how we look be reasons that we avoid or stay away. Love demands that we move toward those how are **unlike us, rather than staying with people who are just like us**. The world unites around similarities (its why we have exclusive Country Clubs), but the church unabashedly unites around our differences since we have someONE ultimately who unites us in Himself.

4. Love gets our eyes off ourselves - This is the challenge and freedom in the gospel. The Bible reminds us that **life is not about us, but its about Christ, others, the gospel, and God's glory**. Self-preservation keeps us from others, and self-centeredness cannot see others as valuable or objects of love. So we must confess our selfish and prideful motives, desires, and actions in order to acknowledge that we often pre-judge, misunderstand, draw conclusions, and simply avoid people that God brings to us to love. In acknowledging that, we can repent, turn, and change.

So, here is the reality. The Gospel demands and expects. If you have given your life to Christ, repented of your sin, and follow Christ, are you moving toward others in love? Are you growing in your desire to see the nations come to Christ? Are you walking in humility toward each other, growing in understanding and compassion, or are you allowing differences to cause fear, anger, and separation. We serve a God who judges impartially, and who calls us to come to Christ the same way, knowing that in the end, that is what we ALL hold in common.

For further reading: "*Let the Nations Be Glad*" by John Piper. This is the quintessential starting point to think about God's glory and the nations (as are most Piper books).