

Sermon 200: Romans 15:9-12: God of All Nations

OUTLINE

Salvation of the Gentiles in the OT
Missions to all nations in the OT

INTRODUCTION

Many Christians without trying have a divided God, the God of the OT, and a second and different God of the NT. This functional Bithesism is a contradiction to the unity of the Scriptures and a seedbed for atheism. Some see the God of the OT as a God of law and wrath and the God of the NT as a God of salvation and love. Maybe you don't have that extreme division in your minds but there are others who think that the God of the NT is a God of all nations, and in the OT He is only a God of one. So missions is a NT phenomena and not an OT one. This is a very wrong headed way to think about God. Our text today is proof of this.

Today we are looking at Rom. 15:9-12, 'As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.'" Paul has been speaking about unity in the church in Rome, and a never before heard of unifying of Jew and Greek in the Church. Both Jews and Gentiles have prejudices that need to be overcome. So here we see Paul quoting the word of God from the OT to prove that this new united body was always God's plan from the beginning. By proving that God is a missionary God Paul is laying a foundation for true racial reconciliation, united worship and God being glorified.

We will look at these verses under two headings. Firstly, we will have a quick look at these OT quotes to show how God had always intended to save a people of all nations. Secondly, I want to look at the concept of missions in the OT more generally.

Salvation of the Gentiles in the OT

Some important general observations before we deal with them individually. Paul gives us four quotes from the OT. It is important to observe that He quotes from every major part of the OT not just one part. 15:9 is quoting Psalm 18:49/2 Sam. 22:50, that is from the Poetic and Historical books. 15:10 is quoting Deut. 32:43, that is from the Law. 15:11 quotes from Ps.117:1, the Psalms. And 15:12 is quoting from Isaiah 11:1, from the Prophets. So the Law, the Historical books, the Psalms and the Prophets are all quoted to allude to God saving a people from all nations.

Secondly, notice that Paul begins this section with the words, 'it is written.' This is to prove by what authority he is making the claim that all different nationalities should unite in Christ. It is not his political theory but the authoritative teaching of God's word. Added to this is that fact that Paul does not quote one verse but four. Two or three witnesses is sufficient to make something true in a court of law, Paul exceeds that count to stress his point. Thirdly, each of the verses chosen has the word Gentile in it.

Let's look at each quote in turn.

The first is from Ps. 18:49. The context of this verse is that this is David's lifestory. In the context Ps. 18:43-48 David speaks of himself as being made head of the nations by God.

David was a type for Christ and is pointing forward to Christ being given all authority in heaven and earth. In David's context this verse came to pass through military conquest but Christ, but the Spirit working through the Word is how we experience it. This verse proves that Christ is the head of the nations, and the head of a worldwide choir to the praise of God.

The second quote is a quote of the Greek translation of Deut. 32:43. The KJV puts it like this, 'Rejoice, O ye nations, *with* his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, *and* to his people.' In the context Moses is prophesying Israel going into idolatry, being punished by God and then restored. This verse is commenting on the restoration. This ties in very well with what Paul has been stressing in Rom. 11. The rescue of the Jews results in salvation for the Gentiles. This results in a united praise.

The next is a quote from Ps. 117:1, this is the shortest psalm in the Psalms. This verse was chosen because this command and call to worship is universal in its scope calling all nations to worship God.

The last verse is from Is. 11:1 and is a well-known Messianic prophecy. Please note how the prophecy clearly indicates the worldwide reign of the Messiah and how this reign is not a reign of terror and subjugation but just as the Messiah is the hope for the Jews He is the hope for the whole world.

Paul's use of the OT is sensitive to Messianic prophecies, types of Christ, the promise of restoration being expanded to include Gentiles, and is expansive as it appeals to the whole of the OT. Paul uses these verses to impress upon the Roman Church their duty to unite. Both parties would be rebuked by these verses. The Jews would be reminded of those verses that mention Gentiles joining them in worship. The Gentiles would be rebuked for thinking that the Jews were finally cast off by God and could not be saved.

Since God is the God of all nations, He has always been the missionary God. These verses act to fuel the missionary endeavour as we obey Christ to take the gospel and make disciples of all nations. To speak of missions in the 21st century is to be politically incorrect. Many nations around the world count missions and missionaries as a vehicle to undermine nationalism. Since Christianity teaches an authority higher than the state, laws greater than the state, and belonging to a people more fundamentally than you can ever belong to a nation, missions is not welcome in many countries. In a Post-Colonial era where many nations have gained their independence and look back with resentment upon those nations that sought to use religion to civilize and control them for financial gain, missions is seen as an instrument of control and oppression. In this era of the African Renaissance, the Maori Renaissance, and other ethnic identities and practices reasserting themselves and validating themselves in a pluralistic society, missions appears to be the imposition of one culture to the denial of another. Add to this a bad track record of European missionaries going into other cultures and conversion to Christianity being confused with becoming more European. Paul's and the bible's teaching on missions shows a better way than these perceptions and past examples.

Paul is telling us that it is only through missions, and the conversion of all nationalities to King Jesus, becoming unified on a spiritual level in the body of Christ that we can have something more fundamental and important than our nationalities. Think about modern attempts at racial reconciliation, how do you unite two historically antagonistic races? Modern theories would say we must get the grandchildren and great grandchildren of past

oppressors to apologise and compensate this generation for past hurts they did not commit. Modern theories insist not that equal opportunity but equal outcomes be forced on all so that the rich are made poorer so that the poor can be made richer, in the course of doing so committing more injustices and adding to the list of sins against one another. The gospel reminds us that we are firstly created human beings made in the image of God not Kiwis or Brits or Maoris. We are also all equal in sin. The gospel comes and makes us one at the spiritual level making us one family in Christ under one new heavenly government. It does not tell us to rebel against the governments of our lands but it does change our priorities and identities and how we see all other people.

Missions and Christianity has also been blamed for the anti-Semitism that has led to persecution of the Jews and even the Holocaust. But we can see from Paul's teaching and the OT quotes that Christianity is not an enemy of the Jews, God made promises to save them along with other nations. God intended to save them and Gentiles into one new family. Anyone who thinks that Christianity is anti-Semitic need only read these verses to see the truth.

The accusation that Christianity is an enemy of culture is also refuted. You see the book of Revelation reveals that final result of God's missionary efforts, Rev. 7:9, 'After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.' In heaven these distinct peoples are recognizable. Their languages and appearances which make them distinct are maintained not obliterated. You see since God made the different nations and delights in their variety, and since the God of common grace and providentially blessed the various people with different aspects of their culture be it art, language, education, customs etc. When Christian missionaries go into an area they should be able to affirm the good in every culture. But since every culture also has sinful aspects it has a way to critique the bad. Every culture is a mix of God's common grace gifts and man's sinful perversions. What I am saying is that Christianity is not a destroyer of culture, but the only way to celebrate and affirm the good in any culture, and a means by which we can remove those things that are bad in any culture. Culture is not a law unto itself, but a gift from God, Christianity is a way of returning to God's intention of any culture. God is not asking the Gentiles to become Jewish in culture, nor vice versa, instead there is a call to tolerate and serve one another and welcome one another as they maintain unity in their diversity.

Missions to all nations in the OT

The key text which reveals that God is a God of all nations in the OT is Gen. 12:1-3, 'Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" We must appreciate the context of these verses. What has come before them? Gen. 1-11 gives us the history of the One and true God who is the Creator of all things and how He made all things and man. It tells us the story of sin and God's judgement. It tells us of the promise of God to send a man born of a woman to undo the works of Satan. It records God's judgement in the flood and the dividing of the nations at Babel. The question comes to mind, what is going to happen to all those peoples? Now that Babel has happened and humanity has been split apart in judgement what will God do? To answer this question we have next the calling of Abraham, a pagan called by God. God has not

forsaken the nations, He will keep the promise that a man born of a woman will make all things right. This can be seen in the promises to Abraham.

In these promises there are three things promised. There is land, offspring as God makes a nation of Abraham and blessing for the nations. God blessed Abraham with a promised land, and a people to fill it, namely the Jews, so that born to them would come the Saviour, not only of the Jews but the whole earth—Jesus Christ. These promises made to Abraham were made with all nations not only the Jews as the final recipients in mind. John Stott while commenting on these promises talks about how there are three ways in which they are fulfilled, there is past fulfilment with immediate and historical fulfilment in the land and people of Israel. There is present fulfilment which we as NT Christians experience where we see a gospel fulfilment in Christ and the Church. And there is a future fulfilment where in the New Creation we will know the greatest measure of what is promised here. The point to make here is that the nation of Israel was brought into being in order to bless the whole world in Christ. The God of the OT was always a missionary God.

But the nation of Israel did not only exist to give birth to the Messiah, they also had the job of bearing witness for God in the OT. You can think of the difference between the people of God on mission in the OT and the NT as the difference between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal force is a force that moves towards the centre, centrifugal force moves in the opposite direction from the centre. The OT had a centripetal mission where they had an attractional ministry, summarily put as 'come and see.' The NT has more of a centrifugal mission where we take the gospel to the ends of the earth, more of a case of 'go and tell.' These must not be seen as polar differences but rather a case of emphasis. For example, in the OT we have the sending of Jonah to Nineveh and in the NT we also have a ministry of attraction where we are to shine as lights, and prove we are Christ's disciples by our love for each other.

God in the OT had a concern for the surrounding nations, and He intended to make His glory known through Israel as a light to the nations. Is. 42:6, "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations." This verse was talking about Israel, but was also pointing forward to the Messiah. In other words, the role of making known the knowledge of God which Israel failed in was the task Jesus succeeded in. And it is a continuing mission for the church as Jesus commands us to be salt and light.

Turn with me to Ps. 67. This is one of the three missionary psalms, 67, 96 and 117 are the three. What I want you to notice about this short psalm is the centrality of God's blessing of Israel and how it leads to the nations coming to the knowledge of God and having their joy in Him. V1 should be familiar to us, it is the Aaronic blessing that the priests spoke in Benediction over Israel. But verse 2 gives us the reason why Israel is seeking the blessing of God, 'that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.' God bless us, so that the rest of the world might see that you are God. They were not seeking this blessing selfishly, but for the glory of God, and not just the glory of God but the glory of God in the salvation of the nations. V5, 'Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah' the psalm ends again talking about blessing upon Israel, v6-7, and how this should lead to the nations fearing God.

How was that supposed to work? Well according to the covenant God made with Israel if they were obedient they would experience blessing. They would know peace from war, rain for crops, fertility in the flocks and fields. When they obeyed God they would have a system

of law superior to the surrounding nations, they would have communities that looked after the poor, they would be a model society with strong marriages and families. In the Ancient Near East this would have stood out as a beacon of hope. We see a little bit of this when the queen of Sheba hears about Solomon's wisdom and comes to see.

We see God's missionary concern when he appoints the nation of Israel as a nation of priests, Ex. 19:6, 'and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' What do priests do? Traditionally prophets represent God to man and declare His word to the people, but priests represent the people to God they pray for them. If Israel is a nation of priests, not only does it mean they are all to be holy, but they also have a ministry of representing men before God.

Melchizedek, Ruth, Rahab, Jonah going to Nineveh, Naaman, Jethro, Job, these are just some of the Gentiles that God saved and gave a knowledge of Himself, some of the ones we know of. They are a sampling, a firstfruit of the nations that He always intended to bring in.

Let me make some application for ourselves. We are speaking about God's missionary heart for all nations and how He uses the OT people in an attractational way to witness to His reality and His worth, that the nations will come and be saved. We as the NT people have a mandate to go out and witness, but let me focus just on this 'come and see' aspect as we make this applicable to ourselves. Matt. 5:14-16, "'You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.' It is clear we have the same calling. So let me ask you, when those who are not believers look at your life what do they see?

Do they see a people who have been saved from sin? I mean a people who have come to see that sin is a terrible thing and who mortify it in their lives and seek to live holy lives. Do we live such holy lives that the only bad things people say about us are only lies to slander?

Do they see our joy in God and not in sin? They live their lives needing constant stimulation and satisfaction from sinful pleasures. They need them for joy, for meaning, for identity and a feeling of purpose. Do we portray a life that is satisfied in God and not sin?

Do they see our joy when we suffer? When God is not our all in all we make something else our foundation. It could be wealth, relationships, health, family and any number of things. But the believer knows that they have an eternal inheritance, that this life is a light and momentary affliction, that God is enough if He is all we have. When we lose those things the unbeliever feels they need, they get depressed and lose the meaning of their lives but the believer has an unconquerable joy in their salvation.

Do they see your kindness? You have been so well served by God that you have no real needs, you have been loved even though you do not deserve it, and this results in you loving those who are unlovely and have not earned it. God the Son came down out of heaven to serve us and gave out of His riches and now this is the pattern for how you serve the needy.

Do they see our unity? Since we are now united in Christ by the Spirit something more important than nationality or sex unites us to other believers. There are friendships and associations that would never be made in the world between all different types of people.

Israel failed in her witness, Christ has succeeded where she failed, and as Christ was sent so are we sent into the world. There is much more to say on speaking the gospel to see people saved, but we must not neglect this key aspect which was part of the OT mission strategy of God and is still a part of what He is doing today.