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Sermon Notes

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The Raging of the Nations Quieted at Last

Isaiah 17:1-14

On June 1, 1980, Atlanta-based Turner Broadcasting Network launched a new venture in news reporting—the world's first 24-hour television news network. The network signed on at 6 p.m. EST from its headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, with a lead story about the attempted assassination of civil rights leader Vernon Jordan.

CNN went on to change the notion that news could only be reported at fixed times throughout the day. At the time of CNN's launch, TV news was dominated by three major networks--ABC, CBS and NBC--and their nightly 30-minute broadcasts. Initially available in less than two million U.S. homes, today CNN is seen in more than 89 million American households and over 160 million homes internationally.

Though CNN reported instantaneously on all the major events of the 80s, including the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Tiananmen Square massacre, CNN really took hold of American culture with its reporting of the first Gulf War, with a live feed from the ninth floor of the Al-Rashid Hotel in the middle of Baghdad on the night the bombing began at 3:00 a.m. on January 17, 1991

Since then, the concept of continuous 24 hour a day reporting of the various events around the world has taken a permanent place in our culture

The tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the earthquake in China, the terrorist attacks in a train station in Spain, the spiraling costs of crude oil, the nuclear research done in Iran, the growth of Islamic influence in Great Britain and France, and the presidential election cycle in the US... all these events give a sense of the seething, writhing convulsions of the nations and the groaning of the planet where we live

Over 27 centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the nations of the earth like a roiling, turbulent sea:

Isaiah 17:12-13 Oh, the raging of many nations-- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters! ¹³ Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale.

I. The Raging of the Nations Described (vs. 12)

A. Timeless Context: The Churning of Evil in the Heart

1. one website listed 142 riots that have occurred worldwide since 2000.
2. amazing the causes of riots

April of this year, riots in Haiti, Bangladesh, Mozambique, and third world nations all over the globe over soaring food costs

Many other causes of riots over the years:

a. political unrest... demands for political changes

Tienanmen Square, 1989... students and other intellectuals led the demonstrations for democracy and freedoms; government responded by a massive military crackdown, including tanks in the streets of Beijing

b. race

Watts, L.A. 1965... racial tensions boiled over; Anti-Sikh demonstrations in India in 1984 after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

The Jakarta riots of May 1998 were a series of riots against ethnic Chinese Indonesians in Jakarta and Surakarta, Indonesia

c. religion

Aug 31, 2007 ... THOUSANDS of tourists were evacuated from the famed Taj Mahal city of Agra after angry mobs set fire to shops and cars in a religious riot after a Muslim festival

d. anti-war demonstrations

during the Civil War... New York Draft Riots in July of 1863; anti-war demonstrations sometimes led to riots in the Viet Nam era

e. food shortages

f. unemployment

g. housing shortages

h. grievances among prison inmates

i. gang violence

j. natural disasters leading to other physical problems

k. excessive pollution

l. even sports... especially soccer championships can frequently lead to murderous riots

all of these riots a clear display of the seething tensions of life on planet earth... it is a globe characterized by rage, violence, destruction of property, hatred, explosions, and death

3. more potently, the "Rise and Fall of the World"
 - a. the rising of nations and empires
 - b. the invasion by one seething power of another country's territory

Isaiah 17:12 Oh, the raging of many nations-- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters!

4. image is of the restless, relentless ocean... undulating, frothy, whipped by the wind, ready to coalesce into a tidal wave of violence and destruction at any moment
5. root cause is clear: sin in the hearts of human beings

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

B. Satan's Rage Imitated... and for the Same Reason

1. this human rage, this seething planet is driven on by our allegiance to Satan and his rebellion against God
 - a. Satan rebelled against Almighty God
 - b. Driven by mindless pride, he aspired to take God's throne and become like the Most High God
 - c. God cast him down to the earth and put him on a timetable for his ultimate destruction

Revelation 12:12 woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

2. when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he effectively enlisted the human race in rebellion against God
 - a. human beings, like Satan, are filled with rage because they have no peace in their hearts
 - b. human beings, like Satan, are filled with rage because they know their time is short

C. Ultimate Rage Directed at Christ: Psalm 2

1. both Satan and humanity direct their most venomous seething rage toward Christ, the Son of God
2. Psalm 2 makes this clear

Psalm 2:1-3 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

D. Immediate Context: The Assyrian Invasion

1. Isaiah 17 is about two of Judah's violent neighbors... two enemy kingdoms, Syria and Ephraim
2. the prediction here is of their total destruction by an invading army
3. the army is none other than the Assyrian Empire... a vast, powerful, seething army
4. what's amazing, however, is that, as powerful and seething and raging as this invading army is, God can blow it away in an instant

II. Judgment on Damascus and Ephraim (vs. 1-6)

A. First, Damascus Judged

Isaiah 17:1 An oracle concerning Damascus: "See, Damascus will no longer be a city but will become a heap of ruins.

1. Damascus: the longest continually inhabited city on earth

Rome is called the "eternal city"

Damascus, Syria, was flourishing a couple of thousand years before Rome was founded in 753 BC, making it the oldest continuously inhabited city in existence.

2. the capital of the Syrian nation in Isaiah's day... also known as Aram
3. one of the most strategic cities of the ancient world
 - a. stood at the mouth of a natural funnel through which ran the only convenient land route between Mesopotamia and Egypt
 - b. pinched by the desert on the east side and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, Mt. Hermon to the north, and a series of inhospitable basalt plateaus stretching south of it

- c. all the trade caravans forced to go through Damascus
- 4. remember Isaiah 7: King Ahaz terrified by the alliance between Syria and Ephraim... now the two of them are linked together by God in an oracle of destruction
- 5. full oracle is plain:

Isaiah 17:1-2 "See, Damascus will no longer be a city but will become a heap of ruins. ² The cities of Aroer will be deserted and left to flocks, which will lie down, with no one to make them afraid.

- a. A picture of desolation
- b. Left to flocks... the flocks will be untroubled by human occupants

B. Then, Ephraim Judged With Syria

- 1. Ephraim is the name of the northern kingdom of Israel
- 2. apostate from the Lord because of the sins of Jeroboam... they had been little more than a pagan, idolatrous, wicked nation for centuries
- 3. they linked themselves with the Arameans, with Syria in an alliance against Judah
- 4. now, they share in their destruction

Isaiah 17:3 The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, and royal power from Damascus; the remnant of Aram will be like the glory of the Israelites," declares the LORD Almighty.

- 5. former opulence and comfort will disappear

Isaiah 17:4-5 "In that day the glory of Jacob will fade; the fat of his body will waste away. ⁵ It will be as when a reaper gathers the standing grain and harvests the grain with his arm-- as when a man glean heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim.

- 6. the picture is of a formerly healthy man whose skin now hangs on his body loosely... like a prisoner of war, starved for three years on minimal rations... so will be the glory of the Ten Tribes of Jacob

C. End Result: Desolation (vs. 9)

Isaiah 17:9 In that day their strong cities, which they left because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and undergrowth. And all will be desolation.

D. How Will the Judgment Come?

1. the Assyrians will invade and sweep both nations away
2. then they themselves will be destroyed, as we've discussed over and over again in Isaiah
3. yet for all of that, the issues here are spiritual, not political or military, as we shall see in a moment

E. YET... Still a Remnant for Israel

Isaiah 17:6 Yet some gleanings will remain, as when an olive tree is beaten, leaving two or three olives on the topmost branches, four or five on the fruitful boughs," declares the LORD, the God of Israel.

1. God can never totally destroy the descendants of Abraham, Jacob's sons
2. even though they are godless and wicked, God maintains for them a remnant to keep the lineage alive
3. the image is of an olive harvest... the harvesters leave a handful of weak, unattractive olives on the trees... not even worth troubling over
4. so the Assyrians and Babylonians later would leave the poorest of the poor in the land

Jeremiah 39:10 But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields.

III. The Root Cause of Judgment: Idolatry

Isaiah 17:7-8 In that day men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands, and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles and the incense altars their fingers have made.

A. Worshiping What You Do

1. both the Syrians and the Israelites were idolators
2. they put ultimate value on what their own hands had made... they crafted their own gods after their own image and their own imagination
3. their foolishness Isaiah will highlight later in his prophecy

Isaiah 44:12-17 The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry

and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint. ¹³ The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. ¹⁴ He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. ¹⁵ It is man's fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. ¹⁶ Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm; I see the fire." ¹⁷ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, "Save me; you are my god."

4. so also today, Americans worship idols as well

apart from Christ's saving work:

- a. we put ultimate value on what our hands have made
- b. we bow down to our own achievements... our career, our education, our inventions, our sales records, our wealth and prosperity, our religious deeds and accomplishments, our trophies and victories

B. Crafting a Religion Around Idols

1. having exchanged the glory of God for images, they crafted whole religious systems and practices around those idols
2. they had altars, where they offered sacrifices to demon-gods, to gods that didn't really exist
3. they had Asherah poles, which represented the feminine side of deity... the goddesses who were frequently worshiped through sexual immorality on the high places... shrine prostitutes carried out their wicked religious duties with a stream of so-called worshipers

C. But the Whole System Is Empty

1. Isaiah says that when the judgment comes, they will realize how empty their religion was
2. they will cry out to their gods and goddesses, but they will not hear or answer, for they do not exist
3. the extreme situation, the invasion of the massive Assyrian army will cause these idolators to reject their idols, altars, and Asherah poles

D. Deepest Issue: Rejecting God (vs. 10)

1. Israel (and the Arameans too) had willfully rejected the true God, the creator of the ends of the earth

Isaiah 17:10 You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress.

2. this wicked exchange is central to the fall of the human race

Romans 1:22-25 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.... ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.

3. it's especially tragic for Israel, the northern tribes to forget God, their Savior... their Rock, their fortress
 - a. it was God who had destroyed Egypt and Pharaoh, and had led Israel through the Red Sea by a mighty hand
 - b. it was God who had sustained them through the desert for forty years in the wilderness... who carried them as a father carries his son on his shoulders... who fed them every day with bread from heaven and water from a rock
 - c. it was God who enabled them to cross the Jordan River at flood stage, and to destroy Jericho by a miracle
 - d. it was God who defeated all their enemies under Joshua... enabling them to conquer the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey
 - e. it was God who delivered them again and again from their enemies during the time of the judges
 - f. this was the God they rejected under Jeroboam, when they made golden calves and set up altars, and imitated the religions of the pagans around them
 - g. the greatest tragedy of all time:

Jeremiah 2:11-13 Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. ¹² Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. ¹³ "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

E. Result: A Harvest of Incurable Pain

1. having rejected the true God, every attempt they make to succeed in this world will ultimately fail
2. God's curse will be on the labors of their hands
3. every plant they plant will be pulled up by the roots

Isaiah 17:10-11 You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress. Therefore, though you set out the finest plants and plant imported vines, ¹¹ though on the day you set them out, you make them grow, and on the morning when you plant them, you bring them to bud, yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain.

4. what a dreadful final end... a day of disease and incurable pain
 - a. certainly we can experience some of that in the trials on earth
 - b. certainly that can refer to an AIDS patient screaming out from the effects of the disease
 - c. certainly that can refer to any disease that takes us out of this world
5. ultimately it refers to the wrath and curse of God on the damned in hell... the only incurable pain there is

Isaiah 66:24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

IV. The Effect of the Judgment: Genuine Faith in God

A. A Ray of Hope: Judgment Brings Repentance

Isaiah 17:7-8 In that day men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands, and they will have no regard for the Asherah poles and the incense altars their fingers have made.

B. Israel Finally Looks to God

Isaiah 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

1. the look of faith
2. the look of trust
3. the look of prayer

C. Remembering the Power of their God

1. their Maker
2. the Holy One of Israel
3. their Savior

D. Looking to Christ Before the Final Judgment Comes

Illus. Charles Spurgeon's conversion

"At last, one snowy day – it snowed so much I could not go the place I had determined to go to, and I was obliged to stop on the road, and it was a blessed stop to me – I found rather an obscure street, and turned down a court, and there was a little chapel. I wanted to go somewhere, but I did not know this place. It was the Primitive Methodist chapel. I had heard of these people from many, and how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they made my head ache ever so much, I did not care.

"So, sitting down, the service went on, but no minister came; at last, a very thin-looking man came into the pulpit, and opened his Bible, and read these words: '*Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*' Just setting his eyes upon me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, '*Young man, you are in trouble.*' Well, I was, sure enough. Says he, '*You will never get out of it unless you look to Christ.*' And then, lifting up his hands, he cried out, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, '*Look, look, look!*' '*It is only look*' said he. I saw at once the way of salvation. Oh, how I did leap for joy at that moment! I know not what else he said. I did not take much notice of it – I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, they only looked and were healed. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard this word, '*Look,*' what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked by eyes away; and in heaven I will look on still in my joy unutterable."

1. central task of my ministry: so clearly portray Christ crucified that you will know where and how to look to Him to be saved

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Galatians 3:1 Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

2. realizing how much we forget him
3. realizing how idolatrous we are
4. turning away from sin and self
5. turning by faith to Christ

6. looking to His blood for salvation

V. The Raging of the Nations: Quieted at Last (vs. 12-14)

Isaiah 17:12-14 Oh, the raging of many nations-- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters! ¹³ Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. ¹⁴ In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

In the spring of 1942, it looked like the Axis would win the war...

The Germans were on the move again in seeking to crush the Soviet Union... moving with awesome power ever further east... conquering the Crimea and moving on Stalingrad; they were in charge of North Africa

The Japanese were in control of the islands of the South Pacific, the Philippine and the coastal regions of China... they had never lost a battle and looked invincible

The American Pacific fleet of battleships was routed at Pearl Harbor... and the road to Berlin and Tokyo looked almost infinitely long

Who could have imagined that total victory would be won by the Allies within three short years, and those mighty juggernauts of power—Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan—would lie smoldering in piles of rubble, totally defeated?

A. Invading Armies Look Overwhelming

1. so also the Assyrian army looked invincible
2. but as much as they look like an irresistible tidal wave of power, when god rebukes them, they flee like tumbleweeds in a gale
3. no nation on earth is a match for the power of Almighty God

Isaiah 40:15-17 Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Isaiah 40:22-25 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. ²⁵ "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

B. The Rise and Fall of Nations Looks Like it Will Go On Forever

1. but it won't
2. there will come a time of total peace on the earth
3. God's power will usher in the New Heavens and New Earth
4. Christ will reign on a throne of peace

Isaiah 26:1-4 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. ² Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. ³ You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ⁴ Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

C. Peace and Quiet Established on Earth

Zechariah 1:11 "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

D. Because Peace and Quiet Established in Human Hearts

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

VI. Applications

A. Understand the cause of worldwide raging and unrest

1. watch the news like a Christian
2. understand that the riots, wars, demonstrations, gang violence, domestic violence comes from people whose hearts are at war with God
3. see the current events as essentially spiritual

B. Test your own heart

1. is your heart characterized by peace?
2. or do you rage like the raging of the nations?

C. Fight against anger and anxiety in your own heart

D. Be a peacemaker in the world

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

- E. Pray for the Prince of Peace to take his rightful throne
- F. Look forward to the reign of eternal peace