

Look! Listen! - And Overcome!

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

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“One Nation Under God – The Church”

July 5, 2009

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Sermon Text: Revelation 5:9

Scripture Reading: Jonah chs 3 & 4

Introduction

The Pledge of Allegiance of this country includes, as we all know, this phrase –

“One Nation Under God”

That is a true statement – every nation is to be “under God” – under and in submission to His rule and law. In reality of course, it is not true – it is not true of our nation. Our nation is in rebellion against God.

But there is a “nation” that truly is *one nation under God*, and it is that nation which we will be considering this morning. It is, of course, *the Church*. The Body of Christ is the only people,

tribe and nation which is truly *under God*.

Jonah was a racist. He was a Jew. And he was a racist. He hated the Ninevites. He had some understandable reasons in one sense. They were enemies of his own nation. But even when God Himself set out to effect repentance and salvation in Nineveh, Jonah did not want it.

The Jews were a very, very racist people in biblical times. I don't know if that is true today or not – any more than any people are guilty of this sin. But we know from the Scriptures that the Jews hated the Samaritans and they hated the Gentiles – the “uncircumcised.” They saw themselves as *the people of God* and it appears that they largely ignored the many references in their own Scriptures where God speaks of bringing His salvation to the ends of the earth *through the Jews*. But they saw themselves as an end rather than as the means to a greater end.

ESV Isaiah 42:1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;

I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. **2** He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; **3** a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. **4** He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

5 Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: **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,

I have mentioned a history series to you before – *New York* – by Ken Burns. If you watch that series, you will see some perfectly ugly examples of the sin of racism. As immigrants from Europe poured into the melting pot of New York, being processed in huge numbers each day on Ellis Island, the fires of racism burned. The Irish would be at the bottom of the racial ladder in New York, but they would also be guilty of the same sin themselves. There was a terrible

outbreak of racial violence in 1863 called the New York City Draft Riots. The following account is taken from *In the Shadow of Slavery*, by Leslie M. Harris -

In September of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation, which would take effect January 1, 1863, and free slaves in those states or regions still in rebellion against the Union. If any southern state returned to the Union between September and January, whites in that state theoretically would not lose ownership of their slaves. Despite its limits, free blacks, slaves, and abolitionists across the country hailed it as one of the most important actions on behalf of freedom in the nation's history. The Emancipation Proclamation brought formal recognition that the war was being fought, at least in part, on behalf of black freedom and equality.

The enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 capped two years of increasing support for emancipation in New York City. Although Republicans attempted to keep abolitionists from taking a leading role in New York's antislavery politics during the early years of the war, by 1862 abolitionist speakers drew huge audiences, black and white, in the city. Increasing support for the abolitionists and for emancipation led to anxiety among New York's white proslavery supporters of the Democratic Party, particularly the Irish. From the time of Lincoln's election in 1860, the Democratic Party had warned New York's Irish and German residents to prepare for the emancipation of slaves and the resultant labor competition when southern blacks would supposedly flee north. To

these New Yorkers, the Emancipation Proclamation was confirmation of their worst fears. In March 1863, fuel was added to the fire in the form of a stricter federal draft law. All male citizens between twenty and thirty-five and all unmarried men between thirty-five and forty-five years of age were subject to military duty. The federal government entered all eligible men into a lottery. Those who could afford to hire a substitute or pay the government three hundred dollars might avoid enlistment. Blacks, who were not considered citizens, were exempt from the draft.

In the month preceding the July 1863 lottery, in a pattern similar to the 1834 anti-abolition riots, antiwar newspaper editors published inflammatory attacks on the draft law aimed at inciting the white working class. They criticized the federal government's intrusion into local affairs on behalf of the "nigger war." Democratic Party leaders raised the specter of a New York deluged with southern blacks in the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation. White workers compared their value unfavorably to that of southern slaves, stating that "[we] are sold for \$300 [the price of exemption from war service] whilst they pay \$1000 for negroes." In the midst of war-time economic distress, they believed that their political leverage and economic status was rapidly declining as blacks appeared to be gaining power. On Saturday, July 11, 1863, the first lottery of the conscription law was held. For twenty-four hours the city remained quiet. On Monday, July 13, 1863, between 6 and 7 A.M., the five days of mayhem and bloodshed that would be known as the Civil War Draft Riots began.

The rioters' targets initially included only military and governmental buildings, symbols of the unfairness of the draft. Mobs attacked only those individuals who interfered with their actions. But by afternoon of the first day, some of the rioters had turned to attacks on black people, and on things symbolic of black political, economic, and social power. Rioters attacked a black fruit vendor and a nine-year-old boy at the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street before moving to the Colored Orphan Asylum on Fifth Avenue between Forty-Third and Forty-Fourth Streets. By the spring of 1863, the managers had built a home large enough to house over two hundred children. Financially stable and well-stocked with food, clothing, and other provisions, the four-story orphanage at its location on Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street was an imposing symbol of white charity toward blacks and black upward mobility. At 4 P.M. on July 13, "the children numbering 233, were quietly seated in their school rooms, playing in the nursery, or reclining on a sick bed in the Hospital when an infuriated mob, consisting of several thousand men, women and children, armed with clubs, brick bats etc. advanced upon the Institution." The crowd took as much of the bedding, clothing, food, and other transportable articles as they could and set fire to the building. John Decker, chief engineer of the fire department, was on hand, but firefighters were unable to save the building. The destruction took twenty minutes.

In the meantime, the superintendent and matron of the asylum assembled the children and led them out to Forty-Fourth Street. Miraculously, the mob refrained from assaulting the children. But when an Irish observer of the scene called out, "If there is

a man among you, with a heart within him come and help these poor children," the mob "laid hold of him, and appeared ready to tear him to pieces." The children made their way to the Thirty-Fifth Street Police Station, where they remained for three days and nights before moving to the almshouse on Blackwell's Island—ironically, the very place from which the orphanage's founders had hoped to keep black children when they built the asylum almost thirty years earlier.

Here is a question that you may never have asked yourself – living as we do in the Pacific Northwest - Are you a racist? Am I? Is our church racist at all? Do we think, to any degree, that God prefers one nation or ethnic group above another? What is the “face” of Christianity in our minds? We must acknowledge that racism is a sin that is characteristic of fallen human nature, and that we are certainly then not immune from it. It is a sin which we must battle in our thinking. And it is a sin, like all sin, *which is only truly remedied in Christ.*

As we have been going through The Revelation, a certain phrase and idea has been recurring. Listen to it –

NKJ Revelation 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

NKJ Revelation 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

NKJ Revelation 10:11 And he said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

NKJ Revelation 14:6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth -- to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people --

NKJ Revelation 21:24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.... 22:1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations.

You heard it – *all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.* The people of

God, the true Israel – the Church – consists of people whom Christ has redeemed and called from EVERY nation – no matter how tiny. Have you ever thought of that?

EVERY nation, EVERY language group will be represented in the Church in heaven.

That means – surely we must conclude this – that people groups in the remotest times of history (North America for instance, in 900 AD) – had elect people in them. Does this not mean that there will not be a *single language* ever spoken on this earth that will not be heard in heaven.

[Incidentally, does this not address the common question of *what about those who have never heard?*]

In another Ken Burns’ series The West, each episode opens with footage (taken from a low-flying helicopter) of the vastness of the plains, and as the panorama sweeps into view, you hear voices singing in (I suppose) a Lakota (Sioux?) dialect. Each time that I see and hear that scene, I imagine what it would be like if those voices were singing praise to Christ for His redemption. It is not really so far from reality –

ESV Rev 15:2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. **3** And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!

4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come

and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

“The Church in heaven, singing the most perfect praises of Christ, is a choir whose voices come from every nation.”

“As we shall see, however, the Bible’s concept of ‘every nation, people, and tongue’ is not precisely the ‘multi-culturalism’ that is so often promoted in the world today. In Christ, God is making for Himself one nation truly under God, one people whose members are citizens of one heavenly

city and who each one share a common Father.”

ESV 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, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

I. The Beginning of the Division of Peoples

Where did the races originate? Well, we know that the *human race* began as one with Adam and Eve. Ultimately, after the entrance of sin and the fall of man, nations emerged when God effected judgment at Babel and confounded peoples’ common language into language groups and –

ESV Acts 17:26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

As nations and races and tribes set themselves against one another, *war*

emerged. Just consider the horrors of this sin of racism – *genocide* – the obliteration of entire people groups.

But racism is so entrenched in man the sinner that even in *one nation* where ALL the people are, for example, white – the thing still exists. Think, for instance, of the class systems in Britain – “the landed gentry,” upper and lower classes – the “nobility” in other European nations.

“Do we understand that we have brothers and sisters – family – in Christ in Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia – in every nation of the earth? How do we, how do you think of these people?”

Racism then is rooted in the fall of man. It is inherent in man the sinner’s heart and it still lingers in the Christian’s sinful flesh.

II. Racism in the Church

It should not surprise us then that racism does not simply “go away” when people are saved in Christ. We see the early church having to deal with it –

ESV Acts 6:1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the

Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

And these people were ALL Jews! But those who lived in Israel and those who were of the “diaspora” set themselves against one another.

And then again (this, even AFTER Peter had received the vision of Acts 10 instructing him to go to the house of Cornelius) –

ESV Galatians 2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. **12** For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. **13** And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. **14** But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

James rebukes any such favoritism in the harshest terms –

ESV James 2:1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. **2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, **3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” **4** have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

This particular example addresses the “racism” of class – rich vs poor – but certainly it can be applied to all kinds of racism and prejudice. Notice the essence of the sin as identified by James. Racism –

- Makes unbiblical, untrue and unfair distinctions,
- It is the product of *judging* others,
- This judging is motivated by *evil thinking*. Wrong thinking. Untrue thinking. It is the exaltation of SELF (notice that the racist never constructs a race or class system in which HE ends up in the lower class)!

Racism, then, is nothing new. It is sin. And therefore it's psychology is simply *the exaltation of self*.

“I am who I am, I have this skin color, I have this language and culture, I have this heritage, and therefore who I am is superior to whom others are who differ from me.”

III. No Room for Boasting

God has spoken to all of this. He has made it very, very plain that He does not prefer one nation above another – *not even Israel* –

ESV Deu 7:6 “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. **7** It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, **8** but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Election, you see, does not rest upon ANYTHING in us! Therefore, no Christian – just as no Jew of the Old Era – has any basis for *boasting at all!*

Racism, therefore, is entirely counter to the gospel of Christ. Racism is boasting in self. But the gospel leaves no room for us to boast in anyway in regard to ourselves.

ESV 1 Cor 1:26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, **[1]** not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

IV. In Christ the Wall Came Down

The Bible, as we have already noted, is filled with declarations that Christ is for all the nations –

ESV Matthew 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

ESV Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

ESV Mark 11:17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

ESV Luke 24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

ESV Acts 10:28 And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

ESV Romans 1:5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

ESV Romans 4:17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. **18** In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many

nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”

ESV Romans 16:25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages **26** but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—

ESV Galatians 3:8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

Did you realize how prevalent this theme is right on through the entire Bible? That the Abrahamic Covenant itself is absolutely counter to any kind of racial prejudice?

The Church, you see, *becomes the one true nation under God.* How? Because of the work of Christ. Here it is, the remedy and reversal of racism –

ESV Galatians 3:26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. **27** For as many of you as were baptized into

Christ have put on Christ.
28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

See it? When anyone is joined to Christ, that person enters a new family, a new nation, a new citizenship. Old earthly distinctions are, therefore, not recognized in heaven, and they even begin to fade out in the church on this earth as our sanctification proceeds. ALL of us can call Abraham “father” because all of us in Christ are *Jews*. The true Israel, circumcised in heart.

And here is a truly classic Scripture on all of this -

ESV Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he

himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

These words are addressed to EVERY Christian in EVERY nation and culture and era, in EVERY class of society, of EVERY language and tongue.

In Christ, you see, we not only become *new people individually*,

but we become new people *nationally and corporately*. A New People.

“A church with diverse people groups in it is more like the Church in heaven.”

NOTE: This is a “hot button” in some circles, but it has been raised and so we need to comment on it. Amillennial/Covenant/Reformed Christianity has been accused of late of being “anti-semitic” in its eschatology. The assertion has been made that not to recognize the earthly, ethnic Israel as THE focus of the Abrahamic Covenant and of OT prophecies is to lay the groundwork for anti-semitic racism in the Church. That is the assertion.

Well, of course, Reformed Christianity does not deny that God’s promises include a repentance for national, ethnic Israel (Romans 11). But in addition to this, *we would assert that the unbalanced, unbiblical focus on ethnic Israel as the primary and virtually sole recipient of the covenant promises of God is the real source of a widespread anti-Gentile racism which we are seeing the negative effects of today.* God’s promises in Christ are for ALL men of ALL nations who repent and embrace Christ – even those men and women and children

who are born into nations who are the sworn enemies of Israel.

Let’s close with this great passage from Peter – *a man who really, really struggled with racism.* He seems to have come to understand by the time he writes these words –

ESV 1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. **11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Notice how Peter here has even come to a different understanding of “Gentile”! The Gentiles have begun to be *those outside the church.* *Those within are the true Israel, the chosen race, the holy nation and royal priesthood.*

Further – don't miss this – *Peter tells us that – he even tells his fellow ethnic Jews who are Christians this - he tells us that once we were not a nation at all!!!* But wait a minute, the nation of Israel had been around for centuries! Yes, but that is not the nation Peter is talking about. He is speaking of the true Israel which has been brought into existence by God in Christ Jesus. Jew, Gentile by birth, it doesn't matter. Every Christian was born into darkness and it is only by God's mercy that we have been called by Him out of that darkness and into the light of Christ. Peter has come to understand something that devastates racism –

“No human being has any standing, any privileged position, any citizenship before God when they enter this world. All are born as Gentiles. All are born in darkness. None are noble by birth!”

Jonah understands all of this now. He is in the presence of the Lord...and guess what? There are the Ninevites right there with him, because they repented by God's mercy.

published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, **8** but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. **9** Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

ESV Jonah 3:6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. **7** And he issued a proclamation and