

## **A Message to the World** **Isaiah 18:1-7**

Our text this morning is Isaiah chapter 18, the whole chapter. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, I do ask now that you would bless your word to us. I pray that you would bless the reading of your word to us, I pray that you would bless the preaching from your word. Please help me as I speak. Please help us all as we listen. Father, may we be given ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to understand and to obey. I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah chapter 18, starting at verse 1: “<sup>1</sup> Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush, <sup>2</sup> which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters! Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.

“<sup>3</sup> All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear! <sup>4</sup> For thus the LORD said to me: ‘I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.’ <sup>5</sup> For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he lops off and clears away. <sup>6</sup> They shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.

“<sup>7</sup> At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts.”

Thus far in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah has wanted us to understand, he's made it plain to us, that God rules over the nations. God stands at the head of all humanity. All of the nations—even those nations that are pagan, that are idolatrous, that are rebellious, those nations that hate God's people—all of those nations will be ruled over, and not only will be ruled over, but *are* ruled over, by the Lord our God.

God, though He be the covenant God of the people of Israel, the covenant God of the offspring of Abraham, that God is God over all, even though they do not know Him. They may know that there is a God. It's not hard to find, if you speak for example to people who are African, they will tell you that all the natives of Africa believe that there is indeed a God over all creation. They believe they're separated far from Him; they believe they must deal with a whole array of lesser spirits; they must deal with the whole array of ancestral spirits, and various kinds of almost demi-god type figures. But even your most primitive, or most unreached African tribesman has no problem with the idea of believing that there is a God who is God over all.

But it's amazing to think that even those people who do not know, do not love, and do not worship God who is God over all, even those people are serving His will. Even those people, according to His providence and His plan, are being used to accomplish His purpose.

Now the people of Abraham, the Jews, had come basically to the conclusion that God loved them, and that He hated the nations; that God would save them, and He would not save the nations. Think, for example, of the prophet Jonah. When God called Jonah and told him to go and preach to a heathen city, the city of Nineveh, what was Jonah's response? "You want me?" Now you know I'm paraphrasing. I'm not trying to quote this literally. But his response was basically this: "You want me, a Jew, to go and preach to those heathen? And what's more, God, I know that you're merciful, and if I go and preach to the heathen, you might just convert some of them." And he couldn't stand that thought. "No, no! God can't be merciful to the peoples of the world. God can only be merciful to the peoples of Abraham."

So what did he do? Basically, if Nineveh was to his right, he went to his left. If Nineveh was to his west, he went to his east. And he not only went, but he tried to go as far as is possible. He walked down to the ticket agent by the dockside and said, "What's as far away from here as I can possibly get?" And the guy behind the counter scratched his chin, and said, "Well, I've heard—I've heard there's this place way off at the other end of the ocean called Tarshish. That's a long way away." "I'll have a ticket. I'll have a ticket to that place. Let me go there." As far away as he could get, that's where he wanted to go from preaching the gospel to the heathen nations.

But Isaiah has been slowly but surely opening something up to us, slowly but surely making something plain. Though God has til this point not preached the gospel to the nations, though God til this point has not declared the good news to all the peoples of the world, yet He actually has a plan for the nations. God has not allowed the nations to come into being for no other reason than that they will be the victims of fate, or than that they will be the recipients of His judgment. God has a plan to save.

Turn back to Isaiah chapter 11. The first nine verses are a prophecy of the Coming One, the One who comes, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, in verse 1—the branch from His roots that bears fruit; the Spirit of the Lord rests upon Him; the Spirit of wisdom, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord; the One who delights in the fear of the Lord, the One who will be the Saviour, clothed in righteousness—righteousness being the belt of His waist, faithfulness being the belt of His loins. His preaching will bring peace. Wolf dwells with lamb, leopard with young goat, calf with lion and fattened calf—and a child leading them.

Looking at verse 9: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. Now a Jew might have wanted to think that what that meant was that the nation, or the people of Israel, would grow so large and so strong that it would fill the earth. In a way, that is what God has planned. But He's not planning to do that through the biological offspring of Abraham. No, what does it say?

Verse 10: <sup>10</sup> "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. <sup>11</sup> In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from

the coastlands of the sea. <sup>12</sup> He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”

Once again, the Jew might somehow or other imagine that God is not promising peace and mercy to any other than the offspring of Abraham. But the New Testament takes such prophecies and interprets them in this way: It says that those who are of faith are the offspring of Abraham. Those who are born of the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in the Son of God—these are those who are counted as the offspring of Abraham.

So when we find, for example in the prophet Isaiah, that God speaks of gathering His people, His Israel, out of the surrounding nations, He’s not necessarily speaking of drawing back the biological descendants of Abraham. He’s speaking of conversion. He’s speaking of a church that spreads through the world through the preaching of the gospel, calling people to repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that’s what we find here in Isaiah chapter 18. Most of us have probably got a subtitle. In the ESV it says, “An oracle concerning Cush.” It might say something like Cush or Ethiopia in the New King James. It starts off speaking of Cush. Now what I want to suggest to you here is, Isaiah is using Cush as a picture for basically the ends of the earth—far off, unknown nations, the kingdoms of the world. Why do I want to do that?

Well, remember if you will last week in Isaiah chapter 17, Isaiah used a device back at the start of chapter 17: “<sup>1</sup> An oracle concerning Damascus. Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city and will become a heap of ruins.” Move on down to verse 3: “<sup>3</sup> The fortress will disappear from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus; and the remnant of Syria will be like the glory of the children of Israel, declares the LORD of hosts. <sup>4</sup> And in that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low, and the fat of his flesh will grow lean.” Remember Isaiah starts with Damascus, and then he mixes Israel, or the Northern Kingdom, or Ephraim, with Damascus. Why? Because they were joined one to another in an alliance.

And here in Isaiah chapter 18, we have a similar sort of thing. Isaiah uses a similar device here. He starts off in verse 1: “<sup>1</sup> Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush.” Now where’s that? Well, that’s the southern part of the region that we now would call Egypt, down into what we would now call Ethiopia and Somalia. That’s sort of part of Africa, which is the very limit of his knowledge of the nations. The only reason that they would be aware of those nations is the fact that Egypt has dealings with those nations, and Judah has some dealings with Egypt. So it’s kind of second-hand knowledge.

But here’s the thing. He starts off speaking about Cush, but at verse 3, “All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth.” He sort of stretches out the vision. He says, “Think of the nations far to the south that we’ve only ever heard of. Now think of all the world. Think of those nations there, then think of all the world.” Isaiah stretches out his vision, so to speak, to cover the whole globe. Now I know he might not have been thinking in terms of a globe. Who knows? But the whole world—as we would say, the whole globe.

And what's his vision? Well just turn quickly to the end of Isaiah chapter 18, verse 7: "At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide, to Mount Zion, the place of the name of the LORD of hosts."

What's he saying there? Well, who brings tribute to God? The worshippers of God. Who makes acceptable offerings to God? The worshippers of God, the faithful. So Isaiah's saying, Even from this nation that's so far away, that's feared because of its war-like nature—even from that nation, God rules over that nation, and from that nation He will draw a people. He will draw His worshippers.

Let's have a closer look at the text, and I'll just make a few points as we go. Verse 1: "Ah, land of whirring wings that is beyond the rivers of Cush." Well the ESV says "whirring wings." It basically just tends to be suggesting flying insects. It could well be plague locusts, it could be anything like that—a nation almost of plagues. It's exactly the same phrase as used in Deuteronomy chapter 28, in that great long curse passage where God warns the people, if they are not faithful to His covenant, He will send all forms of cursing and punishment on them. Deuteronomy chapter 28:42 uses that exact phrase, and the Scripture there calls it "plagues." So a land of insects—clouds of insects, whirring insects.

Verse 2: "which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters!" And that's that Ethiopian, Sudanese area down on the Nile River. Apparently they made canoes out of papyrus reeds because they were easily carried past the cataracts of the Nile. They could row either up or down the river, and when they wanted to get around the rocky parts—row to the bank, easily lift it up, easily carry it along the river bank, put back in the river on the other side of those cataracts.

Now there's a variation here between our Bibles. Halfway along there in verse 2, where it says, "which sends ambassadors by the sea, in vessels of papyrus on the waters!" the New King James inserts the word "saying there"—"...on the waters, *saying*, Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide." The word "saying" has been put in by the translators of the New King James. They thought they were being helpful. It doesn't actually appear, for example, in the ESV or the NASB or even in the NIV. They haven't put it there.

It would seem that the interpreters of the New King James felt that this was a saying being said to the ambassadors *from* these nations, or from this nation of Cush, which at that time actually ruled over the kingdom of Egypt. So the nation of Egypt is sending messengers, *saying*, "Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide." But, as I said, the word "saying" is just not in the original Hebrew text, and there's not even, for example, a variation or a suggestion of it in the Septuagint—the translation into ancient Greek. So the ESV and the NASB don't say it at all. They say, "Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth." I'm going to go with the ESV and the NASB.

What this suggests is that God is sending His messengers *to* the Cushites—these people of Cush, who at this time are ruling over the kingdom of Egypt. God sends out His messengers “to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide.” You see, they had conquered the lower Nile, what we call Egypt, and going back along the Nile, they had territory where the Nile is two rivers that come into one—the Blue Nile and the Nile joined together. So their land was divided by two rivers.

As I said, verse 3 goes on: “All you inhabitants of the world, you who dwell on the earth, when a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear!” So I’m saying this is the message that God is sending out into all the world. “All you inhabitants of the world, all you dwellers upon the earth—when I raise a signal in the mountains, look! When I do something, pay attention! When I do something, hear me!”

Verse 4: “For thus the LORD said to me.” Now I love that. It’s like Isaiah’s saying, “I’ve got a secret.” Joel spoke earlier from Proverbs, Don’t trust anyone who says they’ve got a vision. It’s true. I completely agree with what Joel was saying. But this is Scripture, and Isaiah here is coming to us as a prophet of God, and he says, “God spoke to me. God told me something. You want to understand here, God told me something.” What did He say?

“I will quietly look from my dwelling like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.” What’s that saying? The Lord watches over all things. He watches over all men and nations. So Isaiah’s message through these sent-forth, let’s call them preachers, or messengers, is: “Understand something. First of all, when the Lord does something, pay attention, and understand this—He’s watching everything you do. He’s watching your every move. He’s watching everything you do. You think that you’re hidden from the sight of the living God. You think that He’s God only over Israel, He’s only the God of the people of Abraham.” Isaiah’s saying, “No. I’ve got news for you. He’s God over you. You just don’t understand. He’s watching! He’s watching your every move.”

Turn to Psalm 33. We’re going to start at verse 13: “The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man; <sup>14</sup> from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, <sup>15</sup> he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds. <sup>16</sup> The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. <sup>17</sup> The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. <sup>18</sup> Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love.”

All the peoples of the world—the Lord looks at all the peoples of the world, and it says that the Lord created, or fashioned, the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds. The whole world answers to God. And yes, God may use men in their wickedness and allow them to do according to their own wicked desires. Why? To accomplish His own purposes in the earth. If God chooses to deal with men in such a way, He has every right to. He’s God over all. You know, the clay does not get to answer back to the potter. You don’t get to answer back to God and say, “Why did you do it this way? What did you think you were doing? I demand justice! You should do what’s right!”

God just laughs at such rudeness and boldness—that you even dare suggest that He’s not doing what’s right, that you even dare question whether He’s doing what’s right. He’s *always* doing what’s right. Everything that He does is right. He rules over all in righteousness, even the wicked. Proverbs 16:4 is the reference: “The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.” He has His use for these people.

Let’s keep reading. Isaiah chapter 18, verse 5: “For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he lops off and clears away.” Now this is very similar to the ending of Isaiah chapter 17. Just look at chapter 17, verse 14, where it speaks of how temporary the works of these wicked ones are, how temporary the threat to God’s people is. Isaiah 17:14: “At evening time, behold, terror! Before morning, they are no more! This is the portion of those who loot us, and the lot of those who plunder us.” In the evening time it looks bad, and the sun comes up in the morning, and it’s gone. They’re dissipated like the mist.

Well now Isaiah gives us another picture expressing a similar thought. You’ve got the grapevines, you’ve got your field of grapevines on their trellises, and it looks so rich and beautiful, and you’re expecting such a bountiful crop. And it’s flowered, and it’s flowered richly, and you have every reason to expect that you’re going to get great heavy bunches of grapes from off these vines. “When the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, he cuts off the shoots with pruning hooks, and the spreading branches he lops off and clears away.”

You see, you don’t mess with grapevines once you’ve got the flower setting grapes. You don’t go near them at that time. When you do that, you’re destroying them. If you’re going to cut grapevines, you cut them in late autumn, after the harvest, after the leaves themselves have started to die with the early frost—that’s when you go out and you prune your grapevines.

But God says, “These nations—they look so rich, they look so strong, they look so wealthy. They’ve got every reason to expect a great, rich harvest.” But God says, “No. Just when they’re looking their best, just when they’re looking the most powerful, I’m going to step forth with my pruning hook and I’m going to destroy their harvest, and they’re going to get none of the things that they expected.”

Verse 6: “They shall all of them be left to the birds of prey of the mountains and to the beasts of the earth. And the birds of prey will summer on them, and all the beasts of the earth will winter on them.” They’re going to become food for the beasts of the field. These nations that think they’re so mighty and powerful. Then there’s tiny little Judah, now basically a city-state, controlling a small amount of land that surrounds that city on a hill. That’s all Judah is. You could almost think of Judah as a pimple in the middle of someone’s back. That’s all Judah is. And it’s surrounded by greater, more powerful, more aggressive nations—Egypt, which is now ruled by the Ethiopians, or the Cushites, and the Assyrians—and they’re all going to go to war around about the people of Judah. And God says they’re going to die on the mountains, and they’re going to be food for the animals.

But even in saying that, you know, here's the thing. Isaiah is sending a message out to all the world. As I've said already, this is what the apostles picked up on in their preaching and in their understanding of the prophets. Isaiah sends a message out to all the world: God is watching. When you think you're mighty, you will be brought down. God will judge you. But not only that—even from among you, even from among those of you who think that you can rebel against the living God, He is going to draw forth His people.

Verse 7: "At that time tribute will be brought to the LORD of hosts from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide." Who's Isaiah speaking of? Well, remember he used exactly that same poetic phrase back earlier in chapter 18, verse 2: "Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people feared near and far, a nation mighty and conquering, whose land the rivers divide."

So this message has been sent out to these people, to the Cushites, and to the whole world. Verse 3: "All you inhabitants of the world." What's the message? The message is, God is going to do something. He's going to raise a signal in the mountains. A trumpet will be blown. Verse 4: God is watching you. All you nations, all you people who think you're separate from God and can do as you please, God is watching. He's watching from heaven. You don't trouble Him. You don't bother Him. Whether you know it or not, you're serving Him. You think that all your efforts are going to draw in a harvest. No, they're not. God is going to destroy your harvest. It is not going to be successful. You think you're going to conquer the earth. No, you're not. Your soldiers are going to lay on the ground and be food for the animals.

And even more than that—more than that, now comes the good news: From among your number, from a people tall and smooth, from a people feared near and far, from a nation mighty and conquering whose land the rivers divide—from among your number, tribute will be brought to the Lord of Hosts, to Mount Zion, the place of the Name of the Lord of Hosts. Tribute will be brought in. You will submit to God. "From among your number, I will call my people. From among your number, I will have worshippers. From among your number, my word will go out and people will be saved."

Once again, we get seven verses in the book of Isaiah, and it's seven verses of the gospel—seven verses of the gospel being preached to all the world; seven verses of the nations being called to repentance, that thread of judgment and the promise of salvation—if they will bend the knee to the Lord God. Other prophets and other authors in Scripture pick up this same picture.

Turn to Psalm 68. Psalm 68 is telling of the fact that God rules over all the earth and rules over all the nations. Now it's a long psalm, and I'm tempted to read the whole psalm but I won't. We'll start reading at verse 24:

“<sup>24</sup> Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—<sup>25</sup> the singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines: <sup>26</sup> ‘Bless God in the great congregation, the LORD, O you who are of Israel’s fountain!’ <sup>27</sup> There is Benjamin, the least of them, in the lead, the princes of Judah in their throng, the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

“<sup>28</sup> Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us.

<sup>29</sup> Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bear gifts to you. <sup>30</sup> Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples. Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute; scatter the peoples who delight in war. <sup>31</sup> Nobles shall come from Egypt; Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God. <sup>32</sup> O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord.”

Why do I turn us there? If you look at verse 29 of Psalm 68, it speaks of gifts being brought to God. “Kings shall bear gifts to you.” And in the Hebrew, that’s exactly the same phrase which in Isaiah chapter 18, verse 7, is being translated as “tribute will be brought.” It’s exactly the same wording. “Tribute will be brought; kings shall bear gifts to you.” And where’s the word going out to? Verse 32: “O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord.” When God crushes the nations, God saves His own people from out of the nations that He is crushing.

You know, we’re still in that theme, aren’t we—“the day of the Lord, the day of the Lord.” And what has happened so far in Isaiah when it comes to the day of the Lord? God’s people are saved, God’s enemies are crushed. It happens when? In the day of the Lord. And now Isaiah speaks of the day of the Lord going throughout all the earth—all the earth; the day of the Lord coming to all the earth. And Psalm 68 speaks in a similar way.

There are similar concepts. We read Haggai chapter 2, verses 1 to 9, in our Old Testament reading. And remember what God’s promise was to the people who were rebuilding the temple at that time—“The tribute of the nations shall be brought into you.” The offering of the nations shall come into the temple of God. In Zephaniah, chapter 3, once again, similar language, a similar idea—the tribute and the offering of the nations being brought into the kingdom of God. Now these things, most likely, had fulfillment in ancient times. I mean, they were similar things.

Turn for example to Second Chronicles chapter 32. We’ll start reading at verse 20. Now this is to do with Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet. Verse 20:

“<sup>20</sup> Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. <sup>22</sup> So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side. <sup>23</sup> And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.” Many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem.

You know, I point this out often, we look in our Old Testament history and we see that many of the things that are spoken of by the prophets had some kind of fulfillment in that time, or in that period of time. So the things that Isaiah says mean something to the people of his day. And the faithful people of his day receive his promises, or they receive from Isaiah the promises of God, and their faith is strengthened.



I mean, say Isaiah is your pastor, your preacher, and you're receiving from him these promises of God. And then in the coming years you see that there is some kind of fulfillment, that there is indeed a fulfillment, that the promises made are true. And then Isaiah says, "But it's going to be greater than that. The message is going to all the world—all the world will be brought in. Hezekiah—he's a good king. Hezekiah is a good son of David. He's truly a son of David. But there's still a Saviour to come. There's still one to come."

You know, think of Isaiah chapters 9 and 11, where he speaks of this one who's going to come—the Son who is promised; the child given; the Son promised; the one who springs from the stump of Jesse. He's speaking of a great Saviour that brings all things to consummation. So if you're a faithful person in that time, your faith is constantly being strengthened.

What did you have to believe in that day? What did you have to believe in that day to be a faithful and justified believer? Well, you had to start at the book of Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15—there would come a seed of the woman who would crush the skull of the serpent, and you had to believe the promises that God gave to Abraham, that from Abraham, He would save a people who cannot be counted—a people greater than the stars under heaven.

You had to believe that God was God, the only God. You had to have your faith in that coming Saviour. You had to believe there was going to be a Son of David. Remember the covenantal progression—Noah, Abraham, David. There was coming a Son of David who would rule over a kingdom forever. He would have a throne that lasts forever. He would be the Mighty King.

And Isaiah is pointing people towards that coming, mighty King. He's pointing people towards that coming fulfillment. We know, with our New Testament eyes opened, we look back and we say, "The fulfillment is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the King, the Son of David. He is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises. God's promise of a coming Saviour is Jesus, and we, as worshippers of the living God, worship in and through the Lord Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, for He is God revealed to us in the flesh—the Word of God who took upon Himself flesh."

Do you want to know God the Father? Get to know Jesus. Why? Because He's God, the eternally begotten Son. And "No one has ever seen God at any time. The only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known"—to use the New King James wording; or "the only God who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known," John chapter 1, verse 18, to use the ESV wording. You want to know God? Get to know Jesus. If you want to get to know Jesus, my friends, understand—you need a Saviour. You're a sinner. You need to be saved.

The problems of the world are not problems of fuel, they're not problems of food, they're not problems of energy, they're not problems of climate, they're not problems of weapons, they're not problems of war. The problem of the world is the problem of sin. It's sin. The only solution that the church has to offer to the world is the gospel. We've got nothing else. God didn't give us anything other than the gospel. He didn't say to us, "Go out and pass legislation." He didn't say to us, "Go out and change the world through the wisdom of men." He said, "Go out preaching the gospel, calling the nations, calling the people to repentance."

And God, through His gospel, exercises His power over the nations. We don't realize that. We feel so weak, and we feel so small, and we feel so insignificant. When we're sharing the gospel, we're exercising the power of God—the power both to call and to condemn. It is a sharp and two-edged sword, the word of God. It calls and it condemns.

Now one of the old sayings that you often hear is “the heat that melts wax is the heat that hardens the clay.” Some hearts are like wax, and they're melted. They're melted before the word of God, they're melted by the promise of Scripture. There are some people who hear the word and they want Jesus. They love what they hear about Jesus. They love what they hear about salvation and forgiveness in God.

And there are other people who hear the word and are like pottery going into the baking oven—the heat doesn't melt them, it sets their hearts hard. They just don't want to hear it. They want what they want. They want their sin. They want this world's pleasures. In the end, it's always sin. There's something they want that they're afraid they won't have *if* they surrender to God. Whether they think it's some kind of vague idea called “freedom”—“If I become a Christian, I'll just become some kind of slave or servant. I can't think what I want to think, and I can't do what I want to do”—whatever it is that they may claim that they want, in the end, what they want is their sins, and the word of God becomes the oven that bakes the pottery and sets it hard.

But my friends, we're the people of God. We're God's children through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The word of God to us is the thing that calls the people of God into the kingdom of God. The word of God to us is precious and beautiful, and we should love our Lord, and love our God, and love the things that He's doing through His church.

If we live in a time of judgment, oh! how we want to see mercy. If we live in a time where God's word is falling on hard ground, oh! how we want to see God lay underneath His seed good ground, soft and well-worked, and ready to receive the Word. I understand that. But our obedience in faithfully preaching the word is what God wants. That's what He wants. That's what He looks down from heaven upon His church to see—people sharing the word; people preaching and proclaiming the word; people speaking the truth into all situations; people who are prepared to bear the reproach of the cross of Christ.

Those who don't want to hear it think we're stupid. That's the way it is. That's what Scripture tells us. But we're always waiting for and hoping for, aren't we—we're looking for the heart that wants to hear the good news. And we've got to believe they're out there. What do we pray when we pray the Lord's Prayer? “Your kingdom come, your will be done.” Has God declared in His word that His will is that His kingdom comes through the preaching of His word and the conversion of His saints? Yes, He has.

Every time you pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done,” you're actually praying that Christ will build His church, and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. And every time we get out in the world and actually dare to open our mouths and share the good news, we're helping—“helping” is the wrong word—we are participating in God's kingdom programme. We're participating, through our obedience, in God's plan for the earth—that nations will be

judged and that even from the nations that are judged, the elect remnant, those whom He is calling by faith—that people will be called. We'll close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you for your word and for the glory that is revealed therein. We pray, Father, that you would help us to base and to found our lives upon your word, that we would learn to think your thoughts after you, according to your word.

Father, we pray that we would be obedient in all that you have for us to do. We pray that we would be given opportunity to share the gospel, and that we would be given the courage to take every opportunity. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.