

Lecture 16- The Gospel (29); North America, The West & Acts 1:8 (32); Israel & The Nations (33)

The church's task is neither to destroy nor to maintain ethnic identities but to replace them with a new identity in Christ that is more foundational than earthly identities.

-Ortiz, p.130

One of the great ironies of our time is that many of the churches that became most successful in this role of culture religion during the past two or three decades are those denominations and sectarian groups that formerly prided themselves on their strict separation from the world.

-Hall, p. 71 (p. 258 in reader)

...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

The synoptic Gospels tell the story of Jesus, and especially that of his cross and resurrection, not as an historical 'quirk,' a sudden and bizarre eruption of divine power into history, but as the climax to a much longer story, the story of Israel, which in turn is the pivotal focus of the story of the Creator's involvement with his world....It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the apostles never understood themselves to be founding a 'new religion.'...The Hebrew Bible sets the call of Abraham and the emergence of the people of Israel against the dramatic background of the story of creation and the alienation of all the 'families of the earth' from their Creator. All human beings share in the solidarity of sin and death.

-Ramachandra, p.229 - 230

Key Terms

Faith & works; assurance & social engagement; identity in Christ; Christendom; Diaspora; missional context; modern self; post-modern self; "Cartesian anxiety;" "something both immanent & transcendent;" "Old covenant Israel;" unique religion; Genesis 12; Romans 4

Lecture Objectives

- Briefly outline the scope of a biblical understanding of "the Gospel."
- Identify implications of today's discussion for Gospel ministry.
- Describe from within a biblical framework, the place and function of North America in God's world mission.
- Identify implications of today's discussion for the work to which you have been called as a part of God's world mission.
- Outline the relationship between Israel and the people of God in various parts of the world.
- Describe the dual role that Romans 4 plays in our understanding that from the beginning 1) God intended to use Israel for the redemption of people from all nations, and 2) God's people have always stood before Him *by faith*.
- Identify ways in which today's discussion has deepened your understanding of your own relationship to old covenant Israel and, consequently, your role in God's world mission.

The Gospel

I. What is the Gospel?

- A. When he stressed faith over against works, Paul was intending to enunciate the inclusive principle of God's right and freedom to choose us without regard to our cultural trophies. Faith, as the absolute gift of a loving, gracious God, is the relativizing leaven in culture.

Western psychology and its theological variants have unjustifiably subjectivized the issue, pitting inward assurance against social engagement. In fact, Paul desired above all to safeguard the cultural particularity of Jew as Jew and Gentile as Gentile, though challenging both Jew and Gentiles to find in Jesus Christ their true affirmation.

-Sanneh, p.47.

II. The Pauline Gospel in Romans and Galatians

A. Gospel and culture

B. Corporate identity

The Church's task is neither to destroy nor to maintain ethnic identities but to replace them with a new identity in Christ that is more foundational than earthly identities.

-Ortiz, p.130.

North America, The West & Acts 1:8

I. Missiology(ies) for Western Culture(s) (Shenk, Bosch, etc.)

II. "From Christendom to Diaspora" (Hall)

"We have still not fully wakened from our dream of a homogenous Christian West. It often leads us to react furiously and in a false context when something happens to shake us out of the dream; we often seek...to realize this dream-ideal, and so apply ourselves to the wrong point altogether."

-Karl Rahner, 1960 (Hall, 68-69)

A. Metaphorphosis – The transformation of disestablishment

1. "Here (in North America), complacency and self-deception on the part of Christian denominations and congregations are the greatest dangers." (70)
2. "One of the great ironies of our time is that many of the churches that became most successful in this role of culture religion during the past two or three decades are those denominations and sectarian groups that formerly prided themselves on their strict separation from the world." (71)

What is the view of church history espoused in this article?

B. Intentionality

1. "We need to learn a critical and constructive theology of the church that is based on the charter of Scripture and informed by the Holy Spirit, in contrast to one that is entrenched in the ecclesial conventions of Christendom" (73)
2. "There is potential present in this enforced distancing from the world that is our present experience of distabishment." (75)

C. Theology

1. "But as we have been centuries in learning the rules of religious establishment, we shall need at least decades to learn the basis of our new vocation as a witnessing community—as salt, yeast, and light." (78)

Who is "we?"

III. Guder

A. "Missional context: understanding North American culture"

B. Modern self to postmodern self

Help from Japan

[Meiji] Japan became an “open country” due to the pressure of various Western countries. Much of the mid- to late-nineteenth century West had passed the classical period of “modernity”...The “ego” of modernity had developed mathematical natural science, civil liberties and classical economics, but lurking underneath that outward pride was an “inward, bottomless cavity and unease.” Takizawa...sees a “danger” at the foundation of the modern Western ego. This is that to which Western proponents of postmodernism point as the “unease of Descartes,” or the “Cartesian Anxiety.”

Confronted with the strong challenge from the West, Japan created a new emperor-centered system in order to avoid colonization. Given the sudden opening of the country, there was no one in Japan who could understand the “inward, bottomless cavity and unease” with which Western thinkers had been struggling. There were, however, a few thinkers who attempted to deal with world problems which they felt within the contemporary realities of Japan, for example Kanzo Uchimura (1861-1930), Soseki Natsume (1867-1916) and Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945). These men neither followed the crowd in the rash import of Western “civilization,” nor were they ultra nationalists who boasted about Japan’s virtues. They wagered their lives to stand at the gaping darkness of the point at which Western modernity had arrived. They sought to probe to the uttermost depths of the form of darkness in which the self itself is enclosed and shut up. ...In each case, the point of escape from darkness that these three men discovered was not something which they understood—having somehow moved away from themselves—as “existing” in some high place. It was rather something both immanent and transcendent, the very root of human life itself. Uchimura praised it through the Bible as “Jesus Christ”....

IV. Van Engen – “Mission Theology in the North American Context”

“The circle is being completed, and we in North America now need the perspectives and advice of our brothers and sisters from the Two-Thirds World to give us new insight into and urgency in bringing the Gospel to our people in a fresh and exciting way. Now we are in need of receiving from others that which we previously shared with the world.” (191)

A. Observations on evangelism

B. Obstacles

1. In our culture

- a. The perception that God is not needed
- b. The privatization of faith

C. Objectives

1. Help from Two-Thirds World Christians to understand and analyze, to be exhorted and challenged.
2. Newness as in 2 Cor 5:17-21:
 - a. Purpose
 - b. Heart
 - c. Urgency
 - d. Programs and methods
 - e. Conversion to God, the church, and the world

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/atlas.html>

V. Conclusion - Acts 1:8

Israel & The Nations

Introduction: Contrasting Western and Non-Western Christian Relationships with Old Covenant Israel—with Notable Exceptions

I. Israel’s Unique Religion within the Ancient Near East

II. Genesis 12 & Romans 4

Israel existed as a nation at all only because of Yahweh's intention to redeem people from every nation. While Yahweh works in all nations, in no nation other than Israel did he act for the sake of all nations. Israel's unique experience of Yahweh issues in a unique socio-political witness to Yahweh among the nations.

-Ramachandra, p.231