

A God Who Hears the Prayers of All Nations

2Chronicles 0 - 6:32-33

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 06 June 2010 00:00

2 Chronicles 6:32-33 *No God Like You: A God Who Hears the Prayers of All People* **Tribes**

Humanity has a tendency to tribalize. I don't mean war paint and dancing around bonfires. But we have tendency to group up. It's human nature to associate with people who look like us, who talk like us, who eat like us, who dress like us. And we tend to separate from people who don't fit into our "tribe."

So, for instance: I remember a summer night when Jay and I were in high school. We'd spent a day up at the lakes and we were driving back to Hospers and Alton in our friend Dave's little green Chevette. And on the way home we decided to cruise the loop in one of the towns we passed through (I'm not going to say which town, but it started with an S, and it wasn't Spencer.)

Now, if you're younger than 30, this probably won't make much sense to you, but "cruising the loop" was a big deal when we were in high school. All these towns had these unofficial routes that we'd drive our cars around and we'd try to meet girls and just hang out. It really didn't make any sense, all I can say is we didn't have Facebook and gas was around a dollar a gallon.

So anyway, we went around the loop a couple times, didn't see a lot going on, and decided to head home. But as we were waiting at the stop sign to get back on the highway all of a sudden we got hit from behind. I whirled around to see a pick-up truck full of guys—and they looked angry. They were yelling at us to get out of their town.

So I started yelling for Dave to "Go! Go!" I don't know if you can imagine a high speed chase when the car in the front is a 1979 Chevy Chevette Hatchback, but Dave gave it everything he had. The car did 0 to 60 in like 43 seconds. Eventually, though, we were heading down the highway with this pick-up chasing us and we're trying to figure out what to do.

Jay wanted to stop and see what the problem was. But I weighed 110 pounds in high school. Our friend Dave was 6'6", but he weighed about as much as I did. We didn't think stopping was a good idea.

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I wanted to find anything in the car that wasn't attached and throw it at them—you know, lighten the load, maybe slow them down. But Dave and Jay didn't think that was a good idea.

Dave wanted to keep driving—and since he was the driver—that's what we did. At one point, as we went around a curve, Dave was shaking so bad that Jay had to steer from the passenger seat. The faster we went, the more the car started to shake as well.

Eventually, the guys in the pick-up got tired of chasing us and turned back. To this day, we don't know why they were chasing us. Maybe we honked at the wrong group of girls. Maybe we looked at them wrong. Maybe they had a thing against Chevettes.

My hunch though, is that it was a tribal thing. We weren't from their town. We went to a rival high school. For whatever macho reason that exists in the teen-age brain, they felt they had to defend their turf. And so they ran us out of town.

That's what I mean when I say we have a tendency to tribalize. We draw the lines in different ways—skin color, language, hometown, cars—but we have a knack for separating ourselves from others.

And we do it with God too. We do it with the church. Once we find God, we have a tendency to want Him all to ourselves. We want people from our "tribe" in the church—but we have a tendency to keep others at arm's length.

But our passage today tells us that God isn't interested in being a tribal God. God isn't interested in being the God of just a few groups of people. God is a Global God.

The Text

Our text this morning is 2 Chronicles 6:32-33. Those of you who have been with us in the last few weeks will remember that we are looking at the prayer King Solomon prayed on the day he

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dedicated the temple in Jerusalem. He starts the prayer by saying to God: “There is no God like you” and then goes on to describe God in sweeping detail, showing us what makes the God of Israel so unique.

And now, as he prays in front of this temple, Solomon prays that God would bless not only Israel, but all the peoples of the earth. 2 Chronicles 6:32-33:

32

“As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when he comes and prays toward this temple,

33

then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.

<<prayer>>

Jehovah and the Foreigner

If there was any group of people who could get tribal about their relationship to God, it was the Israelites. In fact, that’s what they were: a tribe. They were the ethnic descendants of Abraham. There were actually 12 tribes—but they all spring from the same root—and most of the Old Testament—most of the Bible, really—deals with this very specific group of people.

And in the ancient world, everything was divided by tribes. Especially religion. It was assumed that each group of people had their own god--a god who served their purposes and was located in their land. Thus, the Canaanites served Baal, the Philistines worshipped Dagon, the Babylonians had Marduk, the Israelites belonged to Jehovah, and so on.

It was just assumed that you would worship the god of the people to whom you were born.

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The same went for temples and shrines. Whenever an altar was built for a specific god, it was taken for granted that it was a place of worship and prayer for that group of people who belonged to that particular deity. It was inconceivable that someone from another nation might come to worship a different god.

But Solomon, standing in front of the temple he has built for the God of Israel, sees this building as a place of prayer not just for the Jewish nation, but for all the nations of the world. Look again at

verse 32,

Solomon assumes that foreigners—men and women from distant lands—will come to Jerusalem to offer their prayers to Jehovah. He sees God hearing and answering the prayers of people from all over the world.

And why? Why would these people come to worship the God of a different people?

Because, Solomon says, they have heard of “your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm.”

In other words, they will come because Jehovah is a God who acts, a God who gets involved in the affairs of men, a God who makes a difference for those who follow Him. They will come to worship the God of Israel because there is no God like Him in heaven or on earth.

You see, Solomon knows that God isn't like all those other gods. That's the point this whole prayer has been making--the point of our series. All those other gods are mere idols, mythical beings imagined as an explanation to some of the mysteries of life. But Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, is real. He is a forgiving God, a God of justice and mercy. He is a promise-keeping God, a God who speaks with his mouth and then carries it out with His hand. He is an attentive God, a God who hears and responds to the pleas of His servants. And He is an uncontainable God, a God who fills the heavens, even the highest heavens.

It follows, then, that this God isn't just the God of Jerusalem or Israel. He isn't just the God of a certain tribe or a particular upbringing. He is the God of the whole earth. He is THE God.

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God's Desire

And, the thing is, God wants the whole earth to know and worship Him. He wants people from far and wide to pray to Him and serve Him. God's desire is that all the peoples of the earth would praise His name.

Look at

verse 33

. Solomon's request is that God would hear from heaven the prayers of the foreigner and "do whatever the foreigner asks of you."

Now, this seems like a strange request. Solomon is the King of Israel, not of these foreign lands. Why should he care whether or not their prayers are answered? Tribal religion says you look out for you own tribe. Israel's national interests would be much better served if God just disregarded the prayers of other nations. I bet the Babylonians didn't ask Marduk to answer the prayers of Israel.

But Solomon prays this way is because he knows the heartbeat of God.

Look at the "so that" clause in verse 33. "So that" usually means that we're going to get an explanation. Why would God hear and honor the prayers of the foreigner? "So that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name."

If God answers the prayers of the foreigners, then more and more people are going to know Him and fear Him. That is, more people are going to worship Him. And that is exactly what God wants.

Solomon's heart beats with the heartbeat of God. Solomon understands that

God's desire is to see the fame of His name spread to every corner of the earth.□

God's interest is in drawing more worshippers to His side.

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The temple that Solomon has built is not just for Israel, but for the whole world. Jehovah is not just the pet God of one nation—but the God of the universe

The God of Israel is not just one god among many. He is THE God. He is the only creator of heaven and earth, the only ruler of the universe. To Him alone belongs worship, and in Him alone can true satisfaction be found.

And so, Solomon sees the temple in Jerusalem as a beacon calling the peoples of the earth to worship Jehovah. And he knows that it is the job of the Israelites to bear witness to this one true God, to let the nations know about the joy that comes from serving Him.

The God of the Bible is not just the tribal God of a small group of people. Our God is a God who hears the prayers of all people. He is God who wants His name to be known and praised throughout the earth.

Our God is a global God

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All Nations

This is a picture of God painted throughout the Bible:

In the book of Genesis, when God first calls Abraham into a covenant relationship, one of the reasons God gives is so that "

all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you"; (Gen. 12:3).□

In the book of Psalms, the fame of God among the people of the earth is a frequent theme. Psalm 22, for example:

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over

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the nations. (Ps. 22:27-28)

In the gospels, when Jesus throws the money-changers and trinket-sellers out of the temple, He quotes a prophecy from Isaiah that says:

'My house will be called

a house of prayer for all nations.' (Mark 11:17) And in the book of Revelation, the apostle John describes heaven as a place where every nationality and ethnic group is represented:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9)

Truly God is a Global. He is a God whose desire is to be known and praised among all the nations of the earth. He is a God who hears the prayers of all people.

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Two Implications

In the light of this picture of God, how shall we respond? What are the implications of a Global God for our church? I believe there are two implications we need to be aware of today.

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I. □ **Our Church does not Exist for Itself.**

First of all, if the God we worship desires to be known and praised among all the peoples of the earth, then we need to see that

our church does not exist for itself. □

We cannot be tribal Christians. Our God isn't just the God of people who look like us and act like us. He's not just the God of people from Spencer, or from America.

Solomon understood that the Temple he had built was not intended to be some sort of spiritual hideaway for the spiritually 'with-it'; Israelites. It wasn't meant to be an exclusive Jewish clubhouse.

Rather, Solomon knew that God had set the Israelite nation apart as a sort of 'light on a hill.' They were to be the screen upon which God would display His might and His glory. In their obedience, in their culture, and in their worship they were supposed to 'declare His glory

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among the nations" (Ps. 96:3).

In the same way, we need to see that our congregation--this association of Christians we call Hope Reformed Church--does not exist for itself. God doesn't want us to be just a bunch of closet Christians scurrying to our private meetings in a brick building in the middle of Spencer. He wants us to be involved in spreading the fame of His name to every corner of the earth.

God has a greater purpose for us than just having our own spiritual needs met. He is a global God, and that means we need to be a global church.

That means we should welcome people of every color, language, and culture into our midst. No matter what the tribe.

I realize that Spencer is not exactly the most culturally diverse place on the planet. But there is more diversity in our community than is reflected in our church. I mean, look around. You're going to see mostly white faces. I say this with sorrow, but that isn't good. The diversity of our community is not reflected in our church. If we want to follow God's global priorities in our congregation, then that should change.

And more than that, we need to think beyond Spencer. One of the reasons Hope Church supports missionaries to foreign lands is because of the heartbeat of God revealed here. One of the reasons we send groups to Haiti is because we feel called to be a part of spreading the fame of God's name to all the peoples of the earth.

Our church exists to serve God. This may seem obvious, but it needs to be said. Our church exists, not to serve itself, but to serve God. And that means the things God wants need to be the things our church wants.

And God's desire is that all the peoples of the earth would praise His name. He hears the prayers of all people so that they will know his name and fear Him. He's a global God.

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And so, our church should want what God wants. We have a job to do. We must be a global church. We must be global Christians.

II. Our Church does not Exist by Itself

But there is also a second implication. Not only does the fact that God is a global God imply that our church does not exist to serve itself, it also reminds us that **our church does not exist by itself.**

If God's purpose is to spread the fame of His name to all the tribes of the world, then we can trust that already there are many people all around the globe who are serving Him.

That means we are not in this alone. It isn't like our church is out here on an island and our 500 some people are the only ones charged with making God's name known. Rather, we are a part of a worldwide network--we are linked to brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world who are also spreading the gospel.

That doesn't relieve us from the task, but it should encourage us. Our God is a Global God who has a Global church through which to display His glory.

So it's not just our tribe. It's not just our place. God has followers Spencer, IA and Phoenix, AZ. In Pignon, Haiti and Al Manamah, Bahrain. In the steppes of Russian and the plains of Africa. In the tropics of South America and the villages of the Swiss Alps.

God is a global God. He's the God who hears the prayers of all people. And He is calling to Himself people from every tribe and nation in the world.

As I wrap up this morning I want to show you a video. It's the story of one of our members—Dr. Ken Hunziker, a member of our elder board in fact—and a recent trip he took to Africa.

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I think that is fitting that we are celebrating communion on a Sunday when we talk about God's global purposes. Because no matter where the church is located, and no matter the style of worship—whether it's the high church formality of a Cathedral in England or the quiet gathering of a house church in China or the spiritual excitement of a storefront church in Tennessee—communion is something all Christians have in common.

This is the meal that Jesus gave us to remind us of his sacrifice at the cross. This is the meal Jesus instructed us to eat as a remembrance. And it is one of the things that unites His followers all around the world.

More than that, communion symbolizes that we are a global church. In the Reformed Church service book, one of the communion prayers says: "As this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf, and these grapes from many fields into one cup, grant, O Lord, that your whole church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom."

When we celebrate communion, it's not just a private little ceremony for those of us here in Spencer, but is a participation in a worldwide act of worship that anticipates the day when people from every tribe, tongue and nation will be gathered around the king's table in eternity.

So as we serve communion this morning we're going to play some images on the screen that will show the church around the world—with it's many different faces and styles—and let it remind you that we are not by ourselves in this world.

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