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Lord's Day Morning  
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'Things God Loves' Series  
#1

## "God Loves the Nations" Isaiah 49:1-13

### Introduction

Having finished the series *Things God Hates*, we are now going to take up a shorter series looking at the complementary subject, *Things God Loves*. It will be a shorter series, not because God loves less than He hates, but because, as we said last week, God's very nature is defined by His Love. God **is** love. To study the things God loves is to study God. God loves so much and so extensively that the topic is endless. Anything good, anything righteous, anything from above; anything created with the capacity to glorify Him, anything that expresses some part of the creative work of God; anything that reflects some part of His image; anything that is a useful; anything that is offered to Him in praise or thanksgiving. . . and on and on . . . all of these are loved by God. If it points to His glory and splendor and majesty, then it is an object of God's love.

There are many amazing passages that speak of the love of God. Micah asked the question *Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, **Because He delights in unchanging love.** He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to*

*Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old.*

So in this series we want to look at are few of the things that delight God – a few of the things that are the specific target of His unchanging love.

And today we are going to start with the most obvious, the most general and the most crucial. We know it best from places like John 3:16 *for God so loved the world*. At the heart of this subject is the reality that God loves the nations. What I mainly want us to see today is that His love for the world should change the way we approach life. We too often view the world like a consumer. We see how we can use it, take from it and spend its resources for our pleasure. But God's love for the world motivated Him to pay the greatest of all prices to redeem it. As we see His love for the nations, we want to learn how we might love as He has loved.

### [Isaiah 49:1-13]

Before we look specifically at God's love for the nations, let's take just a moment to be reminded of what we mean by love. If we are going to do a series on love we want to make sure we're on the same page. The kind of love we are talking about here is the kind of perfect love that resides in and originates in heaven in the heart of God. It stands in stark contrast to the misapplications of the love of the world which has been twisted by sin. The kind of love we will be examining has several significant characteristics.

1. It is a love that is grounded in commitment not in emotion. That doesn't mean is void of emotion – as Isaiah 49 demonstrates, love and compassion are nearly inseparable.

2. It is a love that is demonstrated in giving rather than receiving. That doesn't mean loving someone has no benefits or rewards or that it's not fulfilling. But it is motivation to give rather than to receive.
3. It is a love that is given freely not doled out because it is earned. Again, that doesn't mean there aren't responsibilities and obligations that accompany love, but love is not based upon one deserving or earning it.
4. It is a love that is sacrificing, not convenient. And again, that doesn't mean a person doesn't want to do it or is only loving under compulsion. But it does mean that love will always be costly.

As we will see in each of the areas that we study, God's love always reflects these truths.

I've just come back from our spring RP Global Missions meeting. It was one of the most difficult meetings we have had in many years . . .

Why do we go through all of this? Why do the some people go? Why do they pay such a great price? Why do others devote so much to help them go – money, prayers, time, energy, concern? Because as much as we try and love the world, it's only a fraction of the love that God has for the nations.

Why do the nations need loving?

It's amazing how often in our study of Scripture we have to go back in time – back to Genesis – in order to understand the present. When God created the earth it was good. He made the light and darkness; the land and the sea; plants and animals; and then he made man in His own image. And it was a glorious place. God declared it to be very good.

But then the fall came and with the fall came a remarkable thing. God cursed the whole earth. Not just the man and the woman who had sinned, but everything was cursed. Things began to rot under the curse. Plants and trees wilted because of draughts and plagues. Animals began to viciously attack one another. Disease ravished every living thing. The whole earth rose up and resisted man. Birth defects came. Insanity. Depression. Hatred.

Creation was in turmoil. There were hurricanes and tornadoes and famines and pestilence and periods of global warming and periods of global cooling. But the creation hadn't done anything. Man was the guilty one.

Why did God curse the world? The answer is because He loved the world. More specifically, He loved people. And if that concept seems funny to you – that God cursed the world because He loved the world, then consider that the cursed served and still serves one purpose. It is a daily reminder to us that we are not God. The curse shows us our weakness, our inability our limits, our finiteness, our sinfulness, and our depravity. It shows us that we need God. It drives us to Jesus Christ.

But sadly, that was not enough. As people multiplied on the face of the earth, they craved independence and autonomy from God. As they rejected God, He sent the flood first and then later He confused their language and scattered them across the globe and divided them into nations.

But that didn't mean God gave up on the nations. He called Abraham to Himself and through him raised up one nation from the many to be a light to the other nations. This would be a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people for His own possession. God loved them, called them by name, set them apart and gave them a land.

But instead of embracing that mission to the world, they became arrogant and judgmental. They grew to hate the world instead of loving the world and they rejected God.

But still God loved the world and the nations. And what we find in Isaiah 49 is the Father's promise to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to bring the work of redemption to reality.

Much of the book of Isaiah is spent confronting the nations of the world with their sin and rebellion. Israel is among them. God sent prophet after prophet, like arrows, to call for faith and repentance. Arrow after arrow, prophet after prophet was rejected. Finally, after the last arrow was sent, the Father reached into His quiver and pulled out a hidden arrow. Look here at Isaiah 49:1-3 (read) *Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me. He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory."* This hidden arrow is Jesus.

He is sent first to Jacob – the nation of Israel to bring them back (vs. 5). *And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the Lord, And My God is My strength).* But that is not enough, nor is it the heart and plan of God to stop there. (Read vs. 6) *He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

And in the end, the love of God for the nations and work of Christ on the cross will win the nations. So finally we see the result predicted in verse 10-13. *They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide them to springs of water. "I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up. "Behold, these will come from afar; And lo, these will come from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim." Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people And will have compassion on His afflicted.*

(Sinim means thorns. Not sure where it was – some say Babylon, others a city in Egypt; some believe China. In any event the idea here is what we find to be a reality in the book of Acts – the gospel goes to every nation.)

If God so loves the nations that Jesus died for people from every place, what should our view of the world be?

1. To understand the world is worthy of redemption.

There is so much sin in the world. So much pain and suffering. For many Christians the goal has become escape. Their eschatology has become one of hopelessness. They await rescue and rapture.

But God's love for the world and His sacrifice for the world should lead us to a different conclusion. God's love for world has set His feet on a path of redemption not just rescue. He has promised to save His people and also to set creation free from its bondage to sin. He has commanded us to disciple the nations. Remember biblical love is grounded in commitment not emotion. You may be discouraged

about world and culture events and the status of things today, but God's love for the world and the nations must lead us to a similar love and commitment to serve well in the time and place He has called us.

2. We need to develop a world and life view that leads us away from a consumer mentality and toward a gospel focus.

That means that rather than the first question being *what can I get*, we should ask what God wants me to give. Remember biblical love is demonstrated in giving rather than receiving. A love for the world and the nations begins with a love for your neighbor. How well are you doing at demonstrating simple yet genuine and concrete love for your neighbor? Are you close enough to know when they are hurting and what needs they have. Are you concerned for their spiritual well-being?

Next week is Easter. Lots of people who usually won't go to church are interested in going on Easter. How about inviting them next Sunday to come with you to church and then go home with you for dinner? Christ demonstrated His love for people by reaching out to them, meeting their needs and showing them compassion.

3. We all need to see the whole world as our responsibility.

We have been sent into the world. That's a big calling – and not an easy one. Remember biblical love is sacrificial.

- All of us need to be informed about the world. Buy a copy of Operation World. Read the newspaper. Ask missionaries to put you on their prayer letter list.
- All of us can pray. We do it in worship. Do you ever pray for missionaries and countries in your private prayer time?

- You can give. RP Global Missions (and others missions) are facing severe financial pressures. You can give to particular missionaries (the Faris, McCulloughs etc. You can give to a country like Sudan. You can give directly to Global Missions. Just a little bit every month can make a big difference. Sacrificing for the world God loves is a big thing.
- Support short term summer missions. Our missionaries of tomorrow are getting their first experience through short term trips. And it's whetting their appetites. Help them go.
- Some of you need to be willing to go yourself. I have little doubt that some of you here today will be call by God to serve Him in another part of the world. Do everything you can right now to be prepared and equipped to serve Him well.

God loves many things. At the top of the list is the world He created. If we are to be like Him, then we must ask Him to give us that same love. Will you examine your heart and your approach to the world, to the nations and to people?