

Christ-Centered Diversity Pt. 1

Various Scriptures

Reggie Sanchez, Gospel Community Church, 11/26/2017

I. Introduction

1. Divisions and the Need for God

In our day, in our nation, over the last year or two, we have seen a dramatic increase – or maybe increased visibility – of the reality that there are stark divisions in our country. We have seen it in politics, we have seen it in social issues, we have seen it in race, and of course it always is present in theology. The obvious need for reconciliation and unity is screaming out on an almost daily basis in many areas of life. As concerning and disappointing as it is to see the stark divisions in our country over many things, what is even more concerning to me is the proposed solutions to these problems. Almost all of them are merely social, they are merely temporal, they are along the lines of agreeing to disagree, or in some cases, the solution is to absolutely wipe out those who disagree with you. What burdens and grieves me is the lack of the sense of the glory and majesty of God and the sufficiency of his Word and his Gospel through Jesus Christ to speak to our divisions. There are some exceptions to this, for sure. There are some great resources on unifying diverse people through Christ, such as John Piper's book, "Bloodlines." But so much of it, even if it mentions the Bible, just does so in passing. It doesn't linger over God's Word, it doesn't ponder God's glory, it doesn't exalt Jesus Christ, it doesn't call us to think about issues with the mind of Christ, it doesn't call us to address problems as sin, with Christ as the solution. It absolutely drains me to listen to the so-called solutions that are Christless, because there is no life in these solutions, even if they occasionally pin a Bible verse on them and then pray in the name of Jesus afterwards.

If there is going to be a true unity among the diverse peoples of the world, it is not godless politicians, godless social leaders, or godless civil rights leaders who are going to lead it. Rather, it is going to be Christians who have a large view of God, who hope in his power and glory, who know him as the most wonderful treasure of their lives, who are willing to be persecuted and slandered, and are willing to suffer and even die to champion the supremacy of Christ and his Gospel in all issues of sin including racism, factionalism, and all forms of division! He is Lord, he is able to bring about what no one else can do, and he alone is able to make enemies become best friends through his Gospel.

But sadly, this is believed so little by his people. We don't champion Christ in the issues of race or other problems because we don't really believe he can or will bring about oneness through his Gospel. Or, we don't champion Christ and his Gospel as unifying those who have nothing in common because maybe we don't understand how this comes about or is possible. As a result, you hear the most unbiblical things come out of the mouths of professing Christians in discussions about unity among diverse peoples. You hear Christians say to other Christians that they don't fit in at a certain church. I have personally been told that by one of my former pastors. You hear Christians claim that they don't fit in with other Christians because they don't have the same worldly interests, are from a different part of town, or a different culture. You see Christians unwilling to associate with other Christians because of these issues, and then among some church leaders, I have heard it put forward as a solution that when you get really diverse people together in a church, you have to plant another church so group 1 and group 2 can fellowship with those who are like them. My soul absolutely abominates this way of thinking. It is so out of step with the Gospel and what Christ has accomplished at the cross that I am not sure it is a stretch to label it as heresy, which Paul comes very close to doing in Gal. 2:14. It weakens the unity of churches, it robs churches of the richness of having different types of people in the congregation and in leadership, and most tragically, it offends the glory of Christ.

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So as we have our Thanksgiving fellowship tonight, we are going to spend a couple of weeks meditating on God, his glory, the Gospel, and a theology of unity in diversity from the Scripture. We will then make application as to how we can practice pursuing the unification of diverse peoples that Christ has accomplished. (In our celebration of diversity tonight, you have all hopefully brought a dish that represents your own unique culture, or another culture, so that around the gift of food, we can all appreciate diversity.) Tonight is going to be almost purely theological and will have a lot of information. As always, the notes will be available if you can't keep up with all of the Scriptures. I am doing this because I want to bring a grand view of God into the discussion. Next week will also be theological, but will get much more practical. So if you are eager for the practical aspect, hang in there with me, I promise it is coming, but for now we are going to try and establish theological roots to the practical application that hopefully will enable love and good deeds to the glory of God.

2. God Has a Heart for the Nations

God has a heart for all nations. He is the one who created the entire world, he is the one who gave us different skin colors, sizes, shapes, and personalities. He has created a diverse people because diversity first exists in God. God is a Triune Deity who exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son, The Son is not the Father, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Son nor the Father nor are the Father or Son the Holy Spirit. They are distinct persons. Each person of the Trinity not only is distinct, but also has a different role as well. Despite the differences among the three persons of the Trinity, they are so unified that they comprise not three gods, but one. There is a wonderful unity and diversity within the Trinity and that being the case, when our Triune God creates us in his image, it should be no shock to us at all that we are different, yet God calls us to be united and one in Him.

Unity and Diversity first exists in God; he designed humanity to share in that, sin has ruined it, and in God's plan of salvation, he did not save just one type of person or one particular people group. Rather, he has saved and will save people from all nations, of all personality types, races, languages, giftedness, backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses. In saving a diverse people, God does not call us to merely peacefully co-exist but keep our distance from others who are not like us. Instead, God calls us to pursue oneness, unity, and love in Christ as we worship him together even though we may have absolutely nothing in common from a worldly standpoint. Tonight I want us to meditate on a salvation-historical overview wherein we see that God has a heart for all peoples, has saved a diverse people in Christ, and calls us to live into that diversity with oneness and unity in Christ.

II. God's Global Plan of Salvation in the Old Testament

1. Creational Design

In the beginning of the Bible we read the creation account in Genesis 1, and in that account it can be observed that the most unique creature among all the living things that God made, is a human being. The reason for this is that it is only human beings who are created in the image of God, meaning that above all other creatures they have a unique and heightened ability to reflect (or image forth) God to the rest of creation. As unique image bearers they were given the

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creational design to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Now, the idea behind this is that when human beings who are in a right relationship with God fill the earth, they will fill the earth with the knowledge of God as they image him forth in truth and faithfulness. This design is given to all of humanity, not just particular races, not just those of a particular gifting, or those from a particular part of the earth; rather, all human beings are to participate in displaying the glory and goodness of God to creation by living in a right relationship with him.

2. The Fall of All of Humanity, Not Part of it.

As we continue in the Bible we know that humanity failed in its creational design to glorify God because Adam and Eve fell into sin. When sin entered the world through the temptations of Satan who took the form of a serpent, it fundamentally changed humanity from being a good image bearer to being a broken, guilt-ridden, lost, and inherently sinful distorted image of God. When sin entered the world, humanity was still in God's image, but through the fall, the way we image God to the creation became perverse, sinful, and inaccurate.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, all of humanity fell into sin; all fell under the curse, and all are in desperate need of salvation. There is not one people group, race, class of people, or residents of a particular area who are immune to this. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). All of humanity, in all of its vast diversity, is a cursed humanity that must be saved; every single human being has this great need in common: namely, the escape from God's wrath and salvation and life in Jesus Christ. This makes all people, no matter what their walk of life is, equally desperate, equally in need, and equally brought low before God almighty.

3. Promise of Salvation for the World

In the Garden as God was cursing all of humanity as a consequence for the intrusion of sin, God also provided hope in Gen. 3:15 by promising that a seed born of the woman Eve would come and destroy the serpent and his works: namely, the introduction of sin and death through temptation. Adam, Eve, and all of humanity who would ever follow them – as well as the rest of creation – had to pin their hopes of salvation, forgiveness, and restoration to God on the Seed of the Woman promised in the Garden, who would save them from their sins. I will flesh this out much more when we begin going through Genesis in January, but for now I would argue that the rest of the book of Genesis, as well as the rest of the Bible, is the outworking of the promise that the Seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman will have hostility towards one another and that ultimately the Seed of the Woman will be victorious over the Seed of the Serpent by dealing a fatal blow to Satan and all who are of his spiritual quality and essence. As it pertains to diversity, this is a global promise; this is the hope for every nation, and there is not one people group who is not under the curse and therefore not in need of salvation; and there is not one people group for whom the promise is not available.

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4. Israel's Special Role

As the Seed promise plays out and develops throughout the Bible, we see early on that one of Noah's sons will have a prominent role in this promise coming to pass. After the flood episode Noah is found drunk, naked, and passed out on the seashore, and one of his sons, Ham, decides to expose him to his brothers Shem and Japheth. This was a wicked thing in God's eyes and he pronounced a curse on Ham's descendants as a result; but for Shem, Genesis 9:26 tells us that "God is the blessed God of Shem." Shem is now a special player in God's unfolding plan of salvation, and we quickly see after Genesis 9 that the next major player in the Bible descends from Shem, and that is Abram, who will later be renamed "Abraham."

In Genesis 12-17 God makes a series of promises to Abraham, one of Shem's descendants, and these promises comprise what is known as the Abrahamic Covenant. Within this Covenant God promises that Abraham would have a vast offspring and that he and his offspring would possess the Land of Canaan wherein they would live in peace and abundance, enjoying victory over their enemies. (Gen. 12:1-7). The greatest blessing God promised Abraham and his offspring was that they will possess the knowledge of God and the blessing of being in a relationship with him (Gen. 17:8). As a sign of this covenant between Abraham and his offspring, God commanded Abraham to circumcise his male descendants when they were eight days old (Gen. 17:9-14).

Another key component of the Abrahamic Covenant is that God promised to make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation, and we know as the story unfolds that this Great Nation is the nation of Israel (Gen. 12:2). Near the end of the book of Genesis, Abraham's descendants are forced to go to Egypt due to a terrible famine in the Land of Canaan, and for the next four-hundred-plus years, Abraham's descendants dwelt in Egypt where they were eventually enslaved by Pharaoh. All of this was promised and predicted by God in Genesis 15, and he also promised that he would deliver them from slavery and bring them back to the Land of Canaan to worship and serve him. In fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, God raised up Moses, and through a series of miraculous plagues and judgments, God delivered Abraham's descendants from Egypt and sent them on a journey to Canaan, just as he had promised.

While in Egypt, Abraham's offspring gained a new title from God when he referred to Abraham's offspring as God's Son (Ex. 4:22-23). After being delivered from Egypt, at Mount Sinai God entered into another formal, covenant relationship with Israel in what we call "The Mosaic Covenant" or "The Old Covenant" or "The Law." Within this Covenant Israel was to live in obedience to God and He, in turn, would bless them. God told Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 that "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation...." What a privileged position one people group is in according to this promise! If they will obey him, they will be his treasured possession among all peoples; they will be a kingdom of priests and a royal nation, and as such will be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6). These are more titles that Israel is gaining as God's story of salvation unfolds, and they are wonderful privileges.

While Israel journeyed through the wilderness on the way to Canaan, God gave Moses a pattern from which to construct the Tabernacle, which was basically a tent that was mobile, wherein God could make his special dwelling among Israel. God also appointed the Levitical Priesthood to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people to mediate between sinful Israel and her holy God that dwelt in her midst. At the end of the book of Exodus, in chapter 40, God's *shekinah* glory dwelt so fully and powerfully within the Tabernacle that none could enter it and all were overwhelmed by it!

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Eventually the Tabernacle gave way to Solomon's Temple, once Israel was permanently back in the Land of Canaan. The Temple was full of splendor and glory and sat upon Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the capital city of Canaan. As with the Tabernacle, when the construction of the Temple was complete, and the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Most Holy Place in the Temple, the Temple was filled with the *shekinah* glory of the Lord (1 Ki. 8:10-11) and not even the priests could stand up and minister because the glory was so overwhelming. The Temple showed that God dwelt with his people; he dwelt in the Temple in a special way and this Temple set Israel apart as a people chosen by God for a special relationship with him, and they had the priesthood serving in the Temple to mediate for them by making sacrifices for their sins.

Within the Land of Canaan, a Kingship in Israel was also established when Israel rejected God as their King and demanded a human king in His place. Though this was sin on Israel's part, God still chose to work and continue to reveal himself through a human king. After the failure of Saul, which was a king Israel would have chosen, God chose his own king and it was King David, a man after God's own heart. Through the King's own worship of God and obedience to his commandments, the King would be a powerful instrument to represent God to the people. God made a covenant with David and promised him that one of his descendants would be to God a Son, and that he would have a permanent rule in an everlasting Kingdom and will build the Temple for God (2 Sa. 7:12-17). He also warned that if David's line turned away from him and stopped following him, that he would bring judgment to the kings, which of course later took place in the Babylonian Captivity.

So Israel, the offspring of Abraham, has a promised land, has Abrahamic promise that God will be their God, is promised a vast Abrahamic offspring, and has circumcision as an identity marker that the Abrahamic Covenant is with Israel. Israel is the Son of God, and if they obey the Mosaic Covenant is God's treasured possession, they are a holy nation, and a kingdom of priests; God makes his dwelling among them in a special way in the Temple, and they even have a covenant about a Davidic King having an everlasting reign! All they have to do is walk in obedience to God to realize these blessings. Now at this point someone may be thinking that it's all about Israel, and if I am going to try and make biblical arguments about unity and diversity, so far, I'm doing a terrible job, because Israel clearly has a privileged position in the Old Testament (which even Paul acknowledges in Romans 3:1-2). Furthermore, you don't have to be a scholar to know that one of the constant themes throughout the Bible is Israel's despising of the Gentiles. Not everyone hated the Gentiles, but it was something that reoccurs multiple times in God's Word, and again, Paul himself acknowledges as much in Ephesians 2:15-17. So, what about the rest of the world? Has God rejected them because he chose to work in Israel in a unique way?

5. OT Promises for the Gentiles

If you read your Old Testament carefully and with understanding, you will find that there are many wonderful promises for the Gentiles that God makes as well. Back in Genesis 9 we have already seen that Ham's son Canaan was cursed and that Shem is given a unique blessing: namely, that God is his God. In 9:27 Noah says, "May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem..." If you read the Table of nations in chapter 10, you will see that Japheth represents the nations as he scatters all over the place in fulfillment of 9:27's prophecy that God will enlarge him. The key thing to note here is that Japheth is going to dwell in the tents of Shem. Why is that significant? It is significant because God is the God of Shem, and a tent is a dwelling place; and where Shem is, there God will also be. So, when it is promised that Japheth will come into Shem's tents and dwell with him, the real blessedness of that promise is that he will also share in Shem's God. There is not one tent for Shem and one tent for Japheth; rather, they come together to dwell in one tent to worship in the presence of God.

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From there, in Genesis 11, we have the episode of the Tower of Babel, wherein the world unites in pride to sin against God by seeking to gain access to him through their own works. In response to this global sin, God curses these people by confusing their languages and scattering them. No longer will they be united, no longer will they be one people; they are going to be divided, and one of the strongest testimonies to their estrangement from one another is the fact that they can't even talk to each other. Nevertheless, God once again provides hope for the ones he cursed, and this time he does it through Abraham and the Covenant he made with him. One of the key promises of this Covenant is that through Abraham and his offspring God promises that he will bless the nations (Gen. 12:3), and they too will receive the blessing that God will be God to them (Gen. 17:8), which is why Paul calls the Abrahamic promise to bless the nations "The Gospel" that justifies the Gentiles who have the faith of Abraham in Gal. 3:7-9.

In fact, in Genesis 17:5-6, Abram's name is changed to Abraham, signifying that he would become the father of many nations; and so we see that one of the ways the nations will be blessed in Abraham is by becoming his children, which the New Testament later reveals happens when they share the faith of Abraham (Ro. 4:16-17; Gal. 3:7-9). Additionally, we see that when the mark of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17, not only was he to circumcise his own offspring, but 17:12-14 shows us that he was to circumcise any servant in his household that was a foreigner as well! Yes, Abraham's literal offspring (namely, Israel) had a unique role in salvation history; however, from the very inception of the Abrahamic Covenant, blessing to the Gentiles is promised and even foreigners are circumcised all the way back in Genesis 17 when Ishmael was first circumcised (17:26-27)!

To make things even more clear that God blesses the nations, in Genesis 48, Jacob, Abraham's grandson, meets his own grandchildren, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born in Egypt while Jacob's son Joseph was there. The significant thing about Ephraim and Manasseh is that they are half-Egyptian and descendants of cursed Canaan! Nevertheless, in Genesis 48:15-21 Jacob pronounces blessing upon them, makes them sharers in Abrahamic promise, and even says his name will be carried among these two tribes, and that among Israel the Jews will pronounce blessings upon Ephraim and Manasseh, two boys who are half Egyptian! All of these blessings for the nations take place before we ever even get out of the first book of the Bible!

Later on in salvation history, as the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, and the Second Temple are built, at every single point those key structures are built with the wealth of the nations. The Tabernacle was built with the wealth from Egypt that was given to the Jews the night of the Passover (Ex. 12:33-36; 25:1-9). Solomon's Temple was built through the wealth acquired by the nations that paid tribute to Israel each year. The Second Temple had its materials provided for by Cyrus, the Persian King who let the Jews return to their land to rebuild the Temple (Ez. 1:2-4). I believe God was showing that the nations will participate in building the house of God through this. (If you think that is a stretch, it is exactly what the prophet Haggai speaks of.)

When the Second Temple was being rebuilt, the inhabitants of the Land tried to help the Jews rebuild the Temple, but the Jews refused. Those who were rejected then opposed the building of the Temple and even got it to be stopped for a short period of time, which greatly discouraged the Jews (Ez. 1-6). So God sent Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets of God, to encourage them and spur them on to completing the rebuilding of the Temple.

In Haggai 2:6-9, through Haggai, God promises his presence with the people to complete the rebuilding of the Temple. But in that prophesy he promises a greater Temple that will exceed the glory of Solomon's Temple. The Temple being spoken of is not going to be the Temple they were presently building. We know this because when the Second Temple is completed, the older Jews are weeping (Ez. 3:12) because it falls so far short of the glory of Solomon's Temple. In fact, the *Shekinah* glory, unlike with the Tabernacle and unlike Solomon's Temple, never fills the Second Temple. So, when Haggai prophesies of a greater Temple to come, it is not the Second Temple they are building that he is referring to, but a future temple beyond that, which will be more glorious than any Temple ever seen. One of the characteristics Haggai

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gives in his prophesy about the greater Temple is that God will shake the nations and the treasures of the nations will come into the Temple! Each manifestation of the Temple had furniture in it built from precious linens and metals like gold. Again, just as the wealth of the nations contributed to the building of every form of Temple in the Old Testament, Haggai predicts that so also the wealth of the nations will fill Haggai's glorious Temple as well!

What about Zechariah? He is a contemporary with Haggai who also prophesied about the Temple during the same struggle Israel was enduring. In Zec. 6:9-15, God promises that a man named Branch, which is a regal, messianic, and Davidic title, will be a King and a priest upon his throne and will build a glorious Temple of God. This isn't the Second Temple either, but rather, is the same future temple Haggai spoke of! By the end of the prophecy God promises that many from far off will come and help build this Temple and so we see yet again, the prophecy that the Gentiles will be intimately included in the future Temple of Branch, the King-Priest, and its up-building!

To further demonstrate promised blessing to the nations in the Old Testament, I want to point out that Isaiah the prophet predicted that the day was coming when Assyria and Egypt, two of the most classic enemies of Israel (both of whom happen to be descendants of cursed Canaan from Gen. 9), will be one day so united with Israel that they will receive Israelite titles. In Isaiah 19 we see a wonderful picture of the promise of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel worshipping together as God sends them a savior and a defender (v. 20) when they call upon the name of the Lord. Listen to the oneness produced by the work of the savior in vv. 24-25: "In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.'"

If you have even a casual grasp of the OT, you know that this promise is staggering! When Israel left Egypt in Exodus 19, they were God's special possession; now Egypt is being called "my people" by the Lord! Assyria is called by God, "the work of my hands," and in Isa. 45:11 that is the exact same name God gives to Israel! So here in the OT are these bitter enemies united as one people, with Assyria and Egypt receiving Israelite titles due to the work of the coming savior and defender. We could say much, much more about this, but for time's sake we will not. But I want you to see that, yes, there is a special role Israel was given in the Old Testament; however, even the Old Testament itself, before the New even exists, is screaming of blessing that is coming to the nations through the God of Israel!

Tragically, the story of the Old Testament is of how Israel fails in her role to walk in obedience to God. Israel has some blessed seasons, but the trajectory of the nation is that of rebellion. The Kings, with a few exceptions, are corrupt, wicked, and idolatrous; the prophets and priests, with a few exceptions, are corrupt, wicked, and idolatrous; and therefore, the people are corrupt, wicked, and idolatrous. They do not show the nations what God is like; they do not bring him glory; they fail to be a light, but rather plunge into the same darkness as the nations; they fail to fulfill a priestly role to mediate the knowledge of God to the nations. The Kings fail to show what a royal son of God who rules for the Lord looks like, and eventually God's presence departs from the Temple, it is destroyed, and the people are taken outside of the land of promise to Babylon! There is no savior in Israel, and there is no savior among the nations, which is why the prophets repeatedly pronounce judgment upon both Israel and the nations.

But there is still hope. There is still a Seed of the Woman that will come and destroy Satan; there is still the offspring of Abraham who will bless Israel and the nations; there is still a Davidic King who will come and shepherd God's people (Ez. 34); there is a future Temple to come that will be indescribably glorious that will be built by Branch, the King-Priest who sits upon his throne; and there will be a New Covenant that God will make with his people, not just Israel but all nations, that his global purposes of salvation might come to pass. When we meet Jesus Christ in the New Testament, we will see that he is the perfect embodiment of everything Israel failed to be and do.

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III. Hope for the World in Christ

1. Christ Is the Embodiment of All Israel Was To Be

From the very beginning of the New Testament, it begins to shout to us that Jesus has come as the one who will fulfill Israel's identity and calling. We have seen how much hope and promise is bound up in the offspring of Abraham and David in bringing the promises of both the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants to pass. The very first verse in the New Testament found in Matthew 1:1 says, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." Now, right there, if you understand your Old Testament, you would just pause over the Scripture and worship God! Jesus Christ is the long-awaited son of Abraham and David and he is going to bring the glorious promises concerning their offspring to pass!

Mary, the mother of Jesus, certainly understood this when she visited Elizabeth after finding out she was pregnant with Jesus. When seeing Elizabeth, she burst into worshipful song and knew the birth of Jesus meant, among other things, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever" (Lk. 1:54-55). Zechariah, the Father of John the Baptist, was filled with the Spirit and prophesied this concerning Christ's birth (Lk. 1:68-74):

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because he has come to help and has redeemed his people. For he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from long ago, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us. He has done this to show mercy to our ancestors, and to remember his holy covenant – the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham. This oath grants that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, may serve him without fear...

There it is again: the birth of Christ, according to the Spirit's divinely inspired Word, is the beginning of God fulfilling the promises to Abraham and David's offspring!

In Exodus 4, we saw that Israel was called God's Son, and in Isaiah 49:6, Israel is also called the light of the world. Again, we see both of these realities wonderfully fulfilled in Christ. At the baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:17, the Father himself bore witness about Jesus in saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In John 1:4-5, 9 John informs us that Jesus is the light of the world, which gives life to all men, and it has come into the World to shine in the darkness. So, Jesus is the Son of God and the light of the world.

What about the Temple? In John 2:19-22 Jesus declares that he himself is the Temple of God, and Paul says in Colossians 1:19 that "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell..." Jesus himself is the Temple of God!

What about the priesthood and the sacrifices that are so intricately woven with the Temple system? Hebrews 7:22-28 tells us that Jesus is a King-Priest who is vastly superior to the Levitical priests of the Old Testament. He is superior because unlike them he is sinless; he is superior because unlike them, he has his priesthood on a permanent basis, whereas the OT priests serve temporarily because they die. He is a superior priest because he ministered in a greater Tabernacle, namely heaven itself (Heb. 9:11-14). He is a superior priest because he doesn't have to offer sacrifices repeatedly, but instead achieved the eternal and complete forgiveness of sins for his people by sacrificing himself one time (Heb. 9:24-26). He is a superior priest because he mediates a better covenant: a covenant that provides once and for all forgiveness of sins, that is able to change the people of the covenant into lovers of God, and that brings the knowledge of God to the people (Heb. 7:22, Heb. 8).

So, all that defined Israel and gave her a unique status and purpose if she would fulfill her calling to walk in obedience to God (which Israel failed at with flying colors) is fulfilled in Christ! He achieved the obedience Israel, the Kings, the Prophets, the Priests, and the offspring of Abraham failed to achieve. Unlike them, Jesus has no sin (1 Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet.

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2:22; Heb. 4:15), and in his perfect life he fulfilled the requirements of obedience that the Law prescribed (Mt. 5:17). In absolute perfection, without any blemish whatsoever, and with the supreme glory of God shining forth, Christ is the son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of God, the Light of the World, the Temple of God, the King-Priest who builds the house of God, the final sacrifice for sin, and the one who brings the knowledge of God by reconciling sinners to him through the cross. All of the hopes of Israel and all of the hopes of the Gentile world are found in Christ who has fulfilled all of God's purposes in glorifying himself through Jesus (Eph. 1:9-10).

At the end of the life of Christ, he gave the hope for all unity between enemies. The biggest gap to bridge, that is more difficult than bridging any strife between man and man, is the gap that exists between man and God because of sin. In John 12:31-32 Jesus announces the blow he will deal to the serpent and the hope for all men by saying, "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out." (There's the pronouncement of his victory over Satan, now listen for how that victory will come) "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Christ must be lifted above the earth and when that happens he will draw ALL MEN to himself, the very men who are separated from him because of sin and are hostile towards him (Col. 1:21-23; Ro. 5:6-11).

What is this lifting of Christ referring to? John tells us in verse 33 by saying, "He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die." The way Christ makes peace with "all men" who are hostile towards the Gospel is by dying on a cross for them. He suffers the punishment and penalty that their sins deserve. He endured the consequences they should have had to endure. And as he died on the cross, he made it possible for there to be forgiveness of sins with God and hope for sinners. He didn't just die for Jews; he died for "all men." This offer of reconciliation, forgiveness, and peace with God is sincerely available to everyone on the planet if they will believe and give their life to Christ. It is available to Jews and it is available to Gentiles alike.

All efforts of unifying diverse people who are not reconciled must begin with this great Gospel reality, or they will be merely works of men, they will glorify men, and they will be dead and powerless and will achieve a false, fragile, and demonic "unity." Healing racism, divisions, and factions, all must begin and be founded on the Gospel of Jesus Christ if anything of true and lasting value is going to happen. It is available to the Jew, and also to the rest of the World. Next week, we will see the new identity that every believer in Christ gains through the Gospel and then meditate over how this new identity that each believer possesses works itself out in the life of the church when there are so many differences. But this wonderful Gospel foundation, that has been in motion since the Garden, must be the first thing we establish here.

Every man, woman, and child, from every race, from every nation, from every neighborhood, with every personality type, with every different type of gifting, with every type of financial resources, and in any other difference you can think of, all are under sin, all are under the curse, and all are completely helpless to save themselves. That reality levels the playing field and destroys boasting against each other. It is only through Christ and his death on the cross that these different types of people can be saved from their sins and reconciled to God. So, not only do we have an equally common problem that we are all powerless to overcome, but also, we have an equally common solution that is sincerely available to all men that we are to lay hold of in the weakness of faith. Just knowing these truths destroys any notion of white supremacy, or brown pride, or the rich boasting over the poor, or any other people boasting over anyone else. The whole world shuts its mouth and is silent before God because of sin, and the hope of all people is found in the salvation Jesus freely offers by faith alone so that no man, no woman, and no people group can boast before him. As we celebrate Christ, as we enjoy each other, as we partake of different types of food together, let us have thankful hearts that God unifies the diverse, for even the world loves those who love them. Let us love those who are not like us, for as different as we may seem to each other, the greatest relational gap ever, the gap between God and man, has been overcome in Christ. If he can overcome the greater gap between man and God, surely he can bridge the lesser gap between man and man.