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Sermon Notes

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The Hand Stretched Out Over All Nations

Isaiah 14:24-32

Today we are going to study the outstretched hand of Almighty God... the full display of His power

We could study His fingers... as David did when he says

Psalm 8:3-4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

fingers also point to God's careful, meticulous skill

The heavens were shaped and crafted by the Master artisan... every star perfectly positioned and arranged in its array

Like Dr. Philip Brand's description of concert pianist Arthur Rubinstein's performance of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*:

"A piano performance is a ballet of fingers, a glorious flourish of ligaments and joints, tendons, nerves, and muscles. I must sit near the stage to watch their movements. From my own careful calculations I know that some of the movements required, such as the powerful arpeggios in *Moonlight's* third movement, are simply too fast for the body to accomplish consciously. Never impulses do not travel with enough speed for the brain to sort out that third finger has just lifted in time in order for the fourth finger to strike the next key.... I marvel too at the slow lilting passages. A good pianist controls his or her fingers independently, so that when striking a two-handed chord of eight notes, each of the fingers exerts a slightly different pressure for emphasis, with the melody note ringing the loudest. The effect of a few grams more or less of pressure in a crucial pianissimo passage is so minuscule only a sophisticated laboratory could measure it. But the human ear contains just such a laboratory, and musicians like Rubinstein gain acclaim because discriminating listeners can savor their subtle nuances of control."

Just as Rubinstein's fingers can play *Moonlight Sonata* with power, beauty, and precision, so the fingers of God crafted and shaped the universe to His perfect specifications

Now, of course, God does not truly have physical fingers... but human fingers were created as dim reflections of God's powers of shaping and creating

So much for God's finger... what about God's hand?

If God's fingers crafted the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, what can the full power of His hand accomplish??

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

Context, God speaks oracles to the nations

Palestine made up of small countries like Balkans

Illus. Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia

Back then: Moab, Ammon, Syria, Edom... plus Israel and Judah

localized tribal deities

Greek gods... Poseidon, god of the deep; Hades the god of the underworld; Mars, the god of war

Jurisdictions over functions.... Some gods were national gods

e.g. Moab had detestable god Chemosh; When the Moabites went out to fight, Chemosh went with them; Moab is gone, and where is Chemosh now??

Philistines had Dagon, the half-man, half-fish... both the Philistines and Dagon are obsolete

b. Biblical picture of God radically different

Jeremiah 23:23-24 "Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.

Isaiah 6:3 "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

- The God of Israel is the Lord of Heaven and Earth... no tribal deity
- Is sovereign over all nations... speaks oracles to them, dictates policy to them, decrees events for them, brings about their rise and fall
- Above all God yearns for their salvation

Isaiah 45:22 "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.

- Entering a section in Isaiah: the oracles to the nations
 - A lone Jewish prophet, living in tiny Judah, speaks God's words over all the earth
 - Isaiah speaks of a sovereign hand of the King of all the earth, orchestrating events to achieve His sovereign purposes
 - Oracle after oracle, from Isaiah's lips... stand over the events of foreign peoples, declaring their sins, warning them of God's judgments, pleading with them to come to God for salvation... predicting the future universal kingdom of the Jewish Messiah, the Davidic King who would be a refuge for the nations
 - Over the next nine chapters, Almighty God will speak to one Gentile nation after another: to the Philistines, to Moab, to Damascus, to Cush, to Egypt, to Babylon, Edom, Arabia and Tyre

Two great lessons for the nations begin right here in our passage today:

- 1) God is sovereign over them and has power to destroy them
- 2) Refuge from God's wrath and destruction is available, but it is found only through the God of the Jews...

Isaiah 21:17 The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken.

As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

John 4:22 salvation is from the Jews.

Amazingly, in these oracles to the nations, God gives a vision of a time when people from every nation on earth will find refuge in Christ and will be called "His people"

But only the wise plan and sovereign power of Almighty God can accomplish this, and it only happens through the affliction and suffering that come from the rise and fall of nations, from wars and rumors of wars, from famines and earthquakes and disease and death

God's plan is to afflict the nations with suffering, so that He can save many of them through Christ

I. The Plan and Power of God Proclaimed (vs. 24-27)

Isaiah 14:24-27 The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. ²⁵ I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders." ²⁶ This is the plan

determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations.
²⁷ *For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?*

A. The Absolute Sovereignty of God Declared to the Nations

1. The Lord Almighty has a statement for the ends of the earth

a. Hebrew = Yahweh Sabaoth...

i) the LORD, the covenant name by which He revealed Himself to Moses in the flames of the burning bush...

ii) Sabaoth = hosts, armies... the mighty power of heaven's armies...

b. The Lord of Hosts has sworn... literally, makes a sworn statement... by Himself He swears...

i) Everything God says is true

ii) But when God swears like this, it is especially powerful, especially captivating

iii) Like when He swore to Abraham on Mt. Moriah, after Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God's command

iv) Like when He swore to His Son concerning His priestly ministry

Psalm 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

When God takes an oath, when the God who cannot lie swears something, we must pay special attention:

So in Isaiah 14:24, the Lord of Hosts swears an oath to the nations:

v) He wants all the ends of the earth to know two things:

1) God has an infinitely wise plan for all nations

2) God has an infinitely powerful hand to make it happen

2. God's absolute sovereignty proclaimed here

a. A topic over which people stumble and fall

b. Human sinners want absolute freedom

i) We don't mind a God who gives us advice and suggestions

- ii) We don't mind a God who lets us make our own choices
 - iii) We don't mind a God who is there to clean up our messes
 - iv) But we want the final say so... we want the freedom to rule our lives at least and as much of the world around us as possible
- c. So the absolute sovereignty of God is repugnant to the natural mind
 - d. But the grace of God transforms us from rebels to sons and daughters
 - e. And slowly we begin to embrace this biblical doctrine that the most High God rules over heaven and earth

3. How important is this doctrine?

A.W.Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*:

The Sovereignty of the God of Scripture is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is Sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that *His right* is the right of the Potter over the clay, i. e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of *the same lump* one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, *that God is a law* unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.

Sovereignty characterizes the whole Being of God. He is Sovereign in all His attributes. *He is Sovereign in the exercise of His power*. His power is exercised *as He wills, when He wills, where He wills*. This fact is evidenced on every page of Scripture.

- In other words, to deny the absolute sovereignty of God is to worship an idol, not the God of the Bible
- It is to leave us preaching a false gospel of human achievement
- It is to leave us vulnerable to deep doubts and unneeded suffering during the painful trials of our lives
- It is to strip us of the greatest weapon in our daily struggle against sin
- It is to deny the clear teaching of the passage in front of us this morning...
Isaiah 14:24-27

B. The First Assertion: God Has a Plan for All Nations

Isaiah 14:26 This is the plan determined for the whole world

1. A plan = God's wisdom, foreknowledge woven together ahead of time to determine the best course of human history
 - a. This plan is shown in scripture to be both massive and minute
 - b. Massive: it covers the rise and fall of empires
 - c. Minute: it extends to tiny details like the falling of a sparrow to the earth and the casting of a lot into someone's lap

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will

- d. It was made before the foundation of the world...

Ephesians 1:4 he chose us in him before the creation of the world

- i) God does not merely react to human choices and shape His plans accordingly
 - ii) God has never learned a single thing and never will... His foreknowledge is perfect and His plan for the whole world is based on His perfect foreknowledge and His loving wisdom
 - e. God's plan is shown in scripture to comprehend all His attributes
2. God's plan in Isaiah 14 is also revealed as being comprehensive, universal, for the whole earth
 - a. God has looked out over all the earth, claiming it is His for He made it
 - b. God's plan extends to every nation on earth
 - i) To every nation on earth He has given evidence of His existence and His power
 - ii) To every nation on earth He has shown kindness by giving rain and crops in their seasons
 - iii) To every nation on earth He has given a sense of His moral law, written on their consciences
 - iv) To every nation on earth He threatens judgment for sins... the death penalty
 - v) For every nation on earth He sent one man, Jesus Christ, as the Savior of the world

Isaiah 14:26 This is the plan determined for the whole world

C. The Second Assertion: God's Omnipotent Hand Will Most Certainly Accomplish that Plan

1. it is not enough that God says here there IS a plan determined for the whole world
2. Almighty God alone has the power to make certain that His plan will most certainly be accomplished

Isaiah 14:24 The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand."

- a. All other beings are subordinate to this plan
 - b. No other plan can be made that will overrule it
3. Why? Because God alone has an omnipotent hand to MAKE IT SO!!!
- a. All of God's wisdom and love went into making the plan
 - b. All of God's omnipotence... all His infinite power and authority will most certainly bring it to pass

Isaiah 14:26-27 This is the plan determined for the whole world; this is the hand stretched out over all nations. ²⁷ For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

- c. Notice the parallelism:

THIS IS THE PLAN

THIS IS THE HAND

- i) Both the plan and the hand extend over all the whole world
 - ii) Both the plan and the hand extend over all nations
4. the hand of the Lord Almighty cannot be resisted

vs. 27 For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

- a. God's hand represents His power to ACT in history, to make a difference, to effect a change
- b. His hand "stretched out" over all nations represents God moving powerfully, exerting Himself
- c. God pits His omnipotence against the collective power of all creation

- d. No creature is powerful enough to stand against Him
- e. No one can stop His hand from extending EXACTLY where He has willed

Now, up to this point we have been speaking of the plan and power of God in abstraction

But in Isaiah 14:25, God applies His sovereign power to accomplish a small part of His overall plan

II. The Plan and Power of God Applied (vs. 25)

Isaiah 14:24-25 The LORD Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand. ²⁵ I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders."

A. God's Eternal Plan Made Up of Small Acts in History

1. as a tapestry is made up of single threads, so history is made of single events
2. God is well aware of the effects of seemingly small things in the flow of history
3. He is just as aware of the big moments too, the famous moments... like D-Day and Gettysburg

B. The Destruction of Assyria Part of God's Plan

1. the most significant moment in the history of Isaiah's lifetime
2. an event we keep coming back to again and again
3. Sennacherib, mighty King of Assyria, invades the Promised Land
 - a. The year is debated over, most likely in 688 B.C.
 - b. Assyria was the dominant force in the Ancient Near East
 - c. The small vassal states had been rebelling, including Judah
 - d. Assyria moved in and conquered almost all of Judah
 - e. A small number of troops were sent with a field commander to the walled fortress of Jerusalem, where godly King Hezekiah was waiting with the tiny remnant that was left
 - f. The Assyrians boasted arrogantly against God and He sent the angel of the Lord to destroy them... 185,000 dead in a single night
4. in this way, God threw the Assyrian out of His land

- a. the yoke of Assyrian authority was broken
 - b. Judah was delivered
 - c. The Assyrians were trampled, crushed
5. notice that God speaks quite personally here... He takes their arrogant blasphemy personally

vs. 25 *I will crush the Assyrian in my land; on my mountains I will trample him down. His yoke will be taken from my people, and his burden removed from their shoulders.*"

- 6. Almighty God is defending His people and His Promised land

III. A Warning to the Philistines: Death is Coming (vs. 28-31)

Isaiah 14:28-31 This oracle came in the year King Ahaz died: ²⁹ Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent. ³⁰ The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety. But your root I will destroy by famine; it will slay your survivors. ³¹ Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks.

A. God Speaks to the Philistines a Message of Warning

- 1. that alone is evidence of grace... God could merely send the destruction without a word
- 2. God is speaking to the Philistines through a Jewish prophet Isaiah
- 3. the context: King Ahaz's death

B. The Philistines: Ancient Enemies of the Jews

- 1. migrated from Crete, and perhaps before that from the Aegean coastlands of Greece
- 2. established a foothold in Palestine along the coastal regions of the land promised on oath to Abraham and his descendents
- 3. their land was an alliance of five Philistine lords in the cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron
- 4. they were the bitter enemies the judges fought, like Samson and Samuel; they were the enemies of King Saul and it was a Philistine named Goliath that David killed as a teenager

5. Once he became King, David attacked them savagely and eroded their power to such a point they were never much of a threat again
6. however, they were still present on the coastlands, still a factor when Ahaz died

C. Isaiah's Warning: Do Not Rejoice... Death is Coming

Isaiah 14:29-30 Do not rejoice, all you Philistines, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent. ³⁰ The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety. But your root I will destroy by famine; it will slay your survivors.

1. False cause for joy: the death of the rod that struck them
 - a. Tempting to think this could be Ahaz himself; but actually Ahaz never struck the Philistines militarily... and it is not likely that Isaiah would call Ahaz or his son, Hezekiah a snake
 - b. More likely it refers to the King of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser
 - c. Assyria had already reduced all of Palestine to vassal level... all these small kings and rulers had to pay tribute to Assyria
 - d. This was the rod that had struck the Philistines
2. Tiglath-Pileser died the same year as Ahaz... 727 B.C.
 - a. The Assyrian tyrant has died!!!!
 - b. There was joy in the Philistine cities
 - c. They sent envoys to Judah to invite Hezekiah to join in a revolution against Assyria
 - d. The messengers arrived and Isaiah gave his warning: **DO NOT REJOICE... A WORSE TYRANT IS COMING!!!**
3. after his death, the Philistines tried to throw off the Assyrian yoke... they eventually fully rebelled against Assyria in 711 B.C.
4. this is the very thing that Isaiah warned them not to do
5. from one snake came another... a poisonous viper in the form of Sennacherib, King of Assyria
6. the poorest of the poor would find refuge... that was the Jews in the Promised Land... and any Gentiles who joined them

7. but the remnant of the Philistines would be destroyed

vs. 30 *But your root I will destroy by famine; it will slay your survivors.*

Root = hope for a future... something that can spring up... but it's gone forever for the Philistines

D. A Cloud is Coming from the North

Isaiah 14:31 Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north, and there is not a straggler in its ranks.

1. the image is of a raging wildfire sweeping toward your home, and a wind brings smoke ahead of time to warn of impending doom
2. "not a straggler in its ranks" = powerful, well organized army
3. this is nothing less than the Assyrian army, which swooped down in 711 B.C. and reduced the Philistine territory completely, making it a part of Assyria
4. the "remnant" (NIV "survivors") would be wiped out... not a single survivor!!

Jeremiah 47:4 For the day has come to destroy all the Philistines and to cut off all survivors who could help Tyre and Sidon. The LORD is about to destroy the Philistines, the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor.

Amos 1:8 I will destroy the king of Ashdod and the one who holds the scepter in Ashkelon. I will turn my hand against Ekron, till the last of the Philistines is dead," says the Sovereign LORD.

5. from this point on, the Philistines are never mentioned again in Isaiah... and from the time of the prophetic warnings of Amos, they are never seen on the pages of history again

do you know any Philistines? They were erased entirely, wiped out completely... killed

6. what a contrast with the Jews; God sovereignly ordained that there would always be a remnant rescued by his grace and power

Isaiah 1:9 Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

King Hezekiah, facing the same Assyrian army, said to Isaiah:

Isaiah 37:4 Therefore pray for the remnant that still survives.

But unlike the Philistines, God's sovereign power is to protect the afflicted of his people and make a refuge for them

So when the Philistine envoys came to King Hezekiah when Tiglath-Pileser had died and celebrated... and tried to get him to join the rebellion, God met them with a warning

DO NOT REJOICE... death is coming soon...

Rather, repent!!!

IV. An Answer to the Nations: A Refuge for the Afflicted (vs. 32)

Isaiah 14:32 What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? "The LORD has established Zion, and in her his afflicted people will find refuge."

A. An Answer? What's the Question?

1. the Philistine envoys are asking Hezekiah to join in a revolution against Assyria
2. the superficial question is "Will you join us?"
3. but two deeper questions
4. Question #1: why do we suffer such affliction?
5. Question #2: is there any refuge? how can I be saved?

B. The Answer: Salvation is from the Jews

1. God's sovereign power will rescue Zion... the afflicted of His people will find refuge in Him
2. the affliction itself is crafted by God to bring His people to Himself
3. true refuge is found there
4. God will sovereignly deliver Judah... the Assyrian army will die by the power of Almighty God, and the humble poor who flee to Him for safety will be delivered
5. an invitation to all the earth:
6. if some Philistines, had heeded this warning they might have been saved from the Assyrians... if they had fled to Jerusalem, to godly King Hezekiah, they would have shared in his deliverance
7. so also for all the Jews themselves... repent and turn to me, says the Lord

C. True Danger and True Deliverance

***Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.
Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***

1 Thessalonians 1:10 Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The real danger is not physical suffering on earth, no matter how devastating

- The real danger is not the possibility of an Islamic terrorist attack on American soil
- The real danger is not the possibility of a coming recession and unemployment, or a trade imbalance with China or a weakening dollar
- The real danger is not the possibility of a California wildfire destroying one community after another, or an Iowa flood overflowing its banks
- The real danger is not the possibility of getting cancer or diabetes

All of these things may come, but they are not the real threat

All of these things may be averted, but that is no real reason to celebrate

The real issue is your soul... the state of your soul... your relationship with Almighty God

And the sovereign God is willing to put his people through amazing afflictions in order to bring them to Himself

V. Applications

A. Meditate Often on God's Sovereignty and Wisdom

1. consider the eternal wisdom of God... the plan He has crafted before the creation of the world
2. consider also the infinite power He brings to accomplishing that plan
3. apply that knowledge to your own life
 - a. tell yourself frequently that God is in control...
 - b. remind yourself that God's hand is stretched out over all nations and no one can turn it back
4. remind yourself also that there is no enemy so powerful God cannot overrule it... including death itself

B. Reflect on the Judgment of the Wicked

1. the arrogant Assyrians came in to conquer Israel and God crushed them in His land
2. remember that God is a refuge and a fortress against the evil people of this world
3. though they seem mighty, wait on the Lord

C. Look Ahead to the New Heavens and New Earth

1. this passage speaks of a place of refuge and safety for the weak and needy

vs. 30 The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety.

2. the ultimate picture of that is our heavenly future
3. spend time every day meditating on the good things God has promised all of us in Christ

D. Stand in Awe over what God Has Done with the Jews

1. the Philistines are extinct as a people
2. so are the Moabites... so are the Assyrians and the Babylonians
3. but there is still a remnant of Jews alive on earth today
4. only the power of God can achieve this
5. the continued existence of the Jews is proof of Isaiah 14:24-27... God's plans and power over all nations
6. know therefore also that God's power will complete all of His purposes and plans for you