

CWI Speaker

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 May 2009

Preacher: Stephen Atkinson

[0 : 0 0] The subject of Israel can be a confusing one. What is the position of Israel today? What has been God's purposes in the past? What are His purposes today? What will be His purposes yet for the people Israel, for the land Israel? There are many diverse views. In some ways, I'm entering into a minefield to endeavor to tackle such a subject.

But I trust that what I bring to you this evening is scriptural, and in many ways I'm not seeking to get into the minutiae of end-time prophecy, but rather paint with something of a broad brush and preach the Bible. Indeed, if I had a text, it might simply be that, the Bible.

But I will draw you to one half a verse, and that is Isaiah 44 and 23. And I'm going to springboard from that verse fairly swiftly to many other verses. So, this is one of those sermons where you, if you've just bought a new Bible and all the pages are stuck together, this is one that's going to get them apart. In Isaiah 44 and 23, we read this little phrase, He displays His glory in Israel.

He displays His glory in Israel. And I want to split our thoughts up this evening into two parts, and the first of those will be of the theological aspect and the scriptural aspect, and the second half will be more applicatory.

I want us to look at Israel as God's prism and God's parable. I'm going to explain what I mean by that. Israel as God's prism, and secondly, as God's parable. First of all, the prism.

[2 : 2 1] What is a prism? Those of you who have studied physics will know far better than I, all the characteristics of a prism. I failed miserably at the subject, and so I had to look it up and examine what it means. Well, a prism very simply refracts light. Light goes through the prism, and it is broken up into spectrum, into the spectrum of the rainbow colors. And I want to suggest to you this evening that through the life and through the history of the people Israel, the light of the glory of God has been broken up and displayed in a multicolored, multidimensioned splendor of God's divine character. God chose Israel to be his prism, to be his refracting object. I want you to realize, and I'm speaking to the converted in this respect, that God did not give us a three-point sermon on how to be saved. God didn't give us a little tract with a number of spiritual laws or a number of points to get us to heaven. I'm not in any way downgrading the importance of tracts or sermons that are three-point or otherwise. But God gave us a book.

God gave us a history of a people. Why? He displays his glory in Israel. And I want you to notice that he didn't take as his prism a squeaky clean, perfectly pure people. He didn't take a Swarovski crystal through which he would shine his divine glorious light. What did he take? He took a fallen, stubborn, weak, flawed people that would represent all peoples. And through that stubborn stone, he displays his glory in Israel. The subject is vast. We could take the multicolored spectrum.

I want simply to focus in on three colors or three characteristics of God. The first is God's everlasting love, which is unconditional. In this prism, we see this color of God's character, everlasting love, unconditional. In Malachi 1 and 2 and 3, we read of Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.

It's a difficult one, isn't it? It's hard to comprehend. It's hard to understand. It's impossible to fathom with our finite human minds. What's difficult about it? Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.

What is most difficult is Jacob have I loved. Why should God love a crooked, twisted Jacob? Why should God love such a people Israel? Because they were so good. No, they're not the Swarovski crystal. But God displays his glory through the stone to show his divine character. And however checkered Israel's disobedient history, the thread that runs through the Scriptures is God's unconditional, everlasting, exceptional affection. It was McShane that said that God has an exceptional affection for Israel. Engraved on the palms of his hands. So much so that Paul would write in Romans 11 that though they are enemies on account of the gospel, they are loved on account of the patriarchs. Now, you have such a story of a twisted Jacob. You have such a story of a twisted people, such a disobedient nation. What does that reveal to us? It reveals the splendor of the living God? It reveals the splendor of the living God who loves with an everlasting love, and whose affection for his chosen is unconditional. And through this stony prism, through the story of this people, is revealed God who is love.

[7 : 28] And you may wonder this evening, how could God love me? You may wonder, how could God love a wretch, a disobedient worm? Does God only love me when I'm squeaky clean? Does God only love me when I'm shining like the Swarovski crystal? Look at the story. He displays his glory in Israel.

Here in his love, not that we loved God. Not that we loved God. Not that we were the crystal.

We were the stone. He loved us, and he gave his only son for us. And then I want you to look at this people today, the people Israel, the stone, stubborn, hard, and pray for them. We read in Jeremiah, the Lord's call to Israel, return to me, I am your husband.

Or in Romans, the Lord's call, all day long I've held out my hands to a disobedient people, but you were not willing. All day long I've held out my hands. If you hold out your hands, it's because you love. God's rainbow color of love, unconditional, everlasting, is refracted through Israel. He displays his glory in Israel. Second color I want us to look at is his merciful grace, unmerited. Merciful grace, unmerited. Jacob, have I loved. It's a difficult verse, isn't it?

Another difficult verse, Romans 9, 18, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy. He's the potter. He takes clay. He takes some for noble purposes. What nobler purpose than to refract his splendor? We read in Nehemiah. It's a full and mighty corporate prayer of confession and charting all the things that God had done for them and all the things that they had done against him. And in effect, you've got the whole history of Israel in that chapter. And I'll just briefly point to a few verses. Verse 6, you gave life to everything. You chose Abraham. Verse 7, you made a covenant.

[10 : 05] Verse 8, you saw the suffering. Verse 9, you sent miraculous signs. Verse 10, you led, you gave, you made known, you did this, this, and this. But they did not obey. And then the prayer continues, but you are a forgiving God because of your great mercy. You didn't withhold the manna.

And he goes on to talk about their entry into Canaan. And again, following disobedience, in your compassion, time, time again, you delivered them. And so we culminated at verse 31, in your great mercy, you did not put an end to them. There are some people that think he's put an end to them today. There are some that think, well, Israel has just gone and blown it. Gone over the edge.

No, they haven't. Because he hasn't put an end to them. He hasn't given them up. He still holds out his hands. They are still loved for the Father's sakes. In your great mercy, you did not put an end to them abandon them. Can the stone be any thicker? Can the light be any brighter? His love, his mercy. Do you see that, dear friends, this evening? Do you see the beauty of that? Do you know it for yourself?

What about your stony heart? What about your disobedience? What about your fall time and again? Will he abandon you? If he eventually gives up on Israel, if they eventually blow it, well, then that's dangerous for you. If we can sin so much that then, since the Jewish people, well, they've really blown it this time and God says enough. Well, what guarantee do you have?

Do you believe in the perseverance of the saints? The perseverance of the saints is because of the perseverance of God with sinning saints. See the glory in Israel. See the prism. This is what God would give to us as His gospel. It's not a three-point sermon how to be saved. Sinner, you merit nothing.

[12 : 33] In Christ, you're given everything. He loves you with an unconditional, everlasting love. In your great mercy, you do not abandon. So wonderful colors. I must rush on. A third color. Divine redemption.

Humanly unattainable. Humanly unattainable. Divine redemption. This is another part of the spectrum. God's character. Romans 9.31 says, Israel who pursued a law of righteousness has not attained it.

They haven't attained it. They can't attain it. Could they not have seen from the outset that man cannot attain it? God promised to provide the land. They were to continually sacrifice and sprinkle blood. Not to make them good enough, but to recognize sin and failure and the need for divine mercy and redemption. We didn't confer on the singing of the Psalms, but Psalm 124, if the Lord had not been on our side, if the Lord had not been on our side, how did God deliver?

How did God redeem from Egypt? Divinely. Plagues crossing a sea. Redemption is divine, not of man's works. What is Israel's existence? What is Israel's biblical existence? What is Israel's history, existence throughout all history? It's miracle. It's divine redemption.

Revelation. Psalm 130, verse 3 says, if you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. That's the mercy and grace. Verse 7 says, with the Lord there is unfailing love. That's the everlasting and unconditional love. And verse 8 of Psalm 130 says, He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. Beautiful verse. He Himself will redeem Israel. And this is where Israel goes wrong and has gone wrong since Paul's day when Paul would speak of their zeal, but not according to knowledge. And Paul would impress upon them that it is God's righteousness that is not your own. Redemption is divine. Of course, Israel's mistake is the world's mistake. It's the proud

[15 : 11] Ulsterman's mistake. It's the proud Scott's mistake. I'm not too bad. I'm reasonably good, and God should let me in at the end because I've led a fairly good life. Salvation is not of works. It is the work of God, where Israel's Messiah. It's the punishment that brought us peace and then peace was upon Him.

And indeed, the initial context is the punishment that brought us Israel peace was upon Him, our Messiah. Israel. And by His stripes we are healed. This is the gospel we preach to Israel. Israel's history is a story of divine redemption.

Israel's religious life is a story of mistaken human effort bent on attaining the favor of God. But when we see refracted through the stone the character of God, He has done it. He has provided the Lamb. Divine redemption.

Everlasting love unconditional. The mercy of God and the redemption of God. So Israel is God's prism.

I could talk at length at other colors of the rainbow, but we must move on. Israel is God's prism to display His glory. Secondly, I want us to think of Israel as God's parable to tell His story.

[16 : 48] Israel is God's prism to display His glory. Israel is God's parable to tell His story. I remember from early years in Sunday school, learning what a parable is. I'm sure you all know what a parable is.

Israel is a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Israel is the parable. Israel is God's earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

I have four little subheadings. I'll be brief. Four subheadings under this parable. First of all, I want us to think of Israel in the story as the favored failure. The favored failure.

Why did God choose this people? Answer? To represent all peoples. God's faithfulness to one people is witness to His faithfulness to us all.

God's faithfulness to one people.

[18 : 24] God's faithfulness to one people.

This is a people blessed, and in them the world is blessed. But in this people also we see sin. We see failure. We see godlessness. We see rebellion. We see hardness of heart.

In this people we see all people. They're all the same. Are we any better than Jewish people? Oh, those stubborn, rebel, hard-hearted Jews.

Look at what they did. Look at what they did. Look at what they did. But we in the church, well, we've had such a wonderful, obedient history. Those Jewish people, look at their history.

It's a story. It's a history of sin and rebellion. Church history is so... No, it's not quite obedient, is it? Is church history any better than Jewish history?

[19 : 45] I would venture to suggest that church history should be even more damning. Because we have greater light. But what has gone on in the name of Christ for 2,000 years?

As popes and prelates and even Protestants, we're mightily flawed.

Are we any better? Is our history more obedient? Oh, those Jewish people, they're the Christ killers, aren't they?

They kill the Messiah. Richard was telling me the story of his wife, Rita, believing Jew, sitting in a church.

And the lady sat down beside her and nudged her. The Jews killed Jesus. And quick as a flash, Rita responded rightly.

[20 : 48] Oh, I thought it was the Italians. The Jews, Jewish leaders wished him dead, didn't have any authority.

In fact, left to their own, they couldn't have done it. It was Pilate that had the authority. And in God's plan and purpose, it was Jew and Gentile conspiring together.

You see, in this blessed people's fall, we also have the blessed humanity's fall. Though we are faithless, God remains faithful.

This is the story that God would have told. He favors failures. That's what we believe in the gospel. It's the story of favored failures.

What a story. The story is also of a furious foe. A furious foe. The enemy is after all of us indeed.

[21 : 56] But the enemy has his sights on Israel. If the enemy could thwart God's purposes for Israel, so he thinks, then God is incapable and God is not all-powerful.

Think of the people of Israel, the land of Israel particularly, where five million Jews are surrounded by two hundred million Arabs. Not all have wished.

Don't misunderstand me. Not all have wished for their destruction, but many of the nations and many of the leaders do. God holds all the nations as a drop in the bucket.

He holds them all in his hands. God has purposes. But there is a furious foe. God has purposes. God has purposes. And Islam is certainly seething against Israel at the present time.

Why? I want to suggest there is a huge theological problem for Islam. When Israel returned to the land in 1948, militant Islam woke up.

[23 : 10] Why? Because a land that was formerly under control of Allah is now in Jewish hands. What a problem for Islam.

So we've had words like jihad repeatedly. We have militant Islam on the rise and we have anti-Semitism on the rise. And so Israel either is denied its existence or Israel is sworn to be moved into the sea.

In Egypt, all public maps, Israel is not named. In fact, on some missionary maps, Israel is not named.

There is a furious foe breathing fire against the woman and her offspring. If Israel ceases to exist, God is either powerless or a liar.

Satan wants to prove that. He can't, but he wants to. That's his silly tactic. And since the salvation of Israel is an integral part of God's final chapter, we're going to look at that in a moment, but there is a fury of the enemy against Israel.

[24 : 28] The fulfillment of God's purposes for Israel in the return to their land and in their in-gathering to their Messiah. These are all signs that Satan's time is short.

And there is this furious foe. Why is Israel hated? Why are some of the media stations so bent on anti-Semitism? Why is anti-Semitism on the rise in churches?

Why is Satan? Why is Satan? Why is Satan? Why is Satan? Satan is stirring the pot. It should not be among us. So there is a story there indeed for all of us of favored failures, of a furious foe.

The third thing I want to consider is the loaned land. The loaned land. I don't want to be political, but I want to talk about the land.

Because I think the Scripture talks about earth. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He made man.

[25 : 39] He set man, Adam, in the earth, Adama. He made man from earth. He gives man earth, man and mud, inextricably linked.

The Garden of Eden was, is, a real piece of land in this earth. Adam was cast forth.

But in God's story, in calling a people, in taking them to Canaan, God is in His parable making a promise. There will be a new man.

There will be a new land. Has God favored a piece of land in this cosmos? Yeah.

Look up at the stars. Look at all the spinning globes up there. Look at those who will send their probes into outer space and see if there's some life on other planets.

[26 : 40] They won't find it, because God has chosen this globe. And from this globe, He scooped the dirt. He breathed His life. Man walked on the earth.

And then similarly, within this globe, God has chosen a piece of land to represent all lands. And later, His land, He would grace with His incarnate footsteps.

If I can say it reverently, the Lord Jesus did not walk the streets of London, Paris, or New York.

God incarnate graced a land. And the Holy Land is Holy Land.

And after 1900 years of exile, we in our day and in our age, we have witnessed the restoration of the land Israel to the people Israel.

[27 : 53] The two chief players in the parable of God are center stage. And anti-Semitism is on the increase.

And the furious foe is breathing fire. And it's all part of the ultimate, final restoration of Edenic paradise for the Israel of God.

Now, let us never super-spiritualize our resurrected existence and lose sight of man and mud. You know, sometimes we take on a Greek philosophical thought that has heaven, something like us, floating up there as disembodied spirits playing harps on clouds.

Heaven is earthy because God has loaned a land and is bringing Adam back to Eden.

But in the parable within our history, we have a people being brought back to a land.

[29 : 09] And the land is Eretz Yisrael. The land is the land of Israel. Adam was given a land to tend and through sin he was removed.

God gave Israel a land, his land, his loaned land, to tend and through sin was removed. But God would restore Adam to a new Eden.

And in the parable, God has restored Israel to Israel. Isn't it interesting that when Israel, the people, left Israel, the land, it became a malarial swamp.

It became disease-ridden, a mess. So when McShane and Bonner went on their mission of discovery in 1839 across to the land, while they came back with such a burden for Jewish mission, they spoke of the land as a mess, as disease-ridden.

It was a malarial swamp for 1900 years. Now, green, blossoming.

[30 : 21] Parable? Steve Maltz writes in his book, their lease will never be torn up, even if the landlord may kick them out temporarily for rule-breaking.

It is Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael. What's in a name? It's important to have the right name. Can I make an important announcement again without being misunderstood or being political?

Palestine doesn't exist currently. It did. It may yet. But it is Eretz Yisrael.

I come from Northern Ireland. I'm an Ulster Scot. My grandfather was from Aberdeen. I have that Ulster Scot's blood.

I live in Northern Ireland. If someone were to say to me, Oh, you live in the Republic of Ireland, don't you? Or you live in Ere, the Gaelic name for Ireland, I might have something to say.

[31 : 29] It once was called Ireland. There once was a united Ireland. There may yet be a united Ireland, but for now, I live in what we call Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland. Palestine. Can we be honest, people? Can we be truthful as Christians?

Well, then let's call it the land of Israel. Without political overtones, call it the truth. And also, let's remind ourselves that Jesus didn't walk the hills of Palestine.

And Jesus wasn't surrounded by Palestinian fishermen or shepherds because Palestine didn't exist until a hundred years after Jesus.

And if you hear any preacher saying that Jesus walked the Palestinian hills, you correct them because it's an anachronism. The favored failures.

[32 : 34] The furious foe. The lone gland. And I must conclude with the final finale of the parable. The final finale.

Finale. 1967. President Nasser of Egypt declared jihad against Israel. It's a word that we know now, don't we?

The furious foe was wanting to wipe Israel off the map. Israel was outnumbered. Tanks, five to one. Israel was outnumbered.

Aircraft, three to one. Israel attacked. Six days later, it was over. And Jerusalem was in Jewish hands for the first time in 1,897 years.

There's a little verse in Luke 21 and 24, which I'm sure you're familiar with, which says that Jerusalem will be trampled of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

[33 : 35] Again, important announcement, church, Jerusalem is no longer trampled of the Gentiles. And since 1967, the number of Jewish believers in Yeshua, in Jesus, has grown from 50 to probably 15,000.

The parable, it's coming to final finale before our very eyes. Now, please don't misunderstand. I'm not going to tell you whether it's next year or the next thousand years. But we're in the final finale.

No century for the 20th century saw such church growth around the world. No century saw greater distress and suffering and war.

20 million died in World War I. 55 million died in World War II. 50 million died in communist revolutions in Russia. 70 million in China.

About 200 million people died violently in the 20th century. We have the church growing at a pace never before in human history.

[34 : 46] We have wickedness growing at a pace. And we have resurrected Israel in a blossoming land coming back to their Messiah. Church, wake up and smell coffee.

You can see while I'm excited about Jewish mission and I want to tell the church to get excited.

Oh, that we had the burden of McShane and Bonner. In 1870, Bonner wrote that Israel, I believe Israel will be restored to the land and I believe all Israel shall be saved.

In 1870, he wrote that. What would he write if he was here today? Israel is God's prism to refract his splendor, to display his glory.

Israel is God's parable to tell his story of favored failures, of a furious foe ever frustrated and a story of resurrection in a promised land, fruitful, blossoming.

[36 : 00] I want you to be excited in this final finale. And I want you to be prayerful. And I want you to be supportive. And I want you to hear front line what Richard and our colleagues are doing among the people Israel.

Stay behind and listen well. My time is gone. I'll end with one more illustration. I love the story of Joseph.

It's parable too, isn't it? Joseph's a type of Christ and he was sold, he was imprisoned, and then he was raised gloriously for the saving of many lives.

I want you to take the story of Joseph. I want you to put Jesus in that story. And you remember how Joseph was hidden from his brothers and how when his brothers came in he couldn't control himself and he had to run out and he wept because of his brothers.

And then later he revealed himself. Jesus was sold by his brothers, the Jewish people.

[37 : 11] He sees them today. They don't see him. He weeps over them. He weeps over his brothers. But one day in the final finale they'll recognize him as he says, I'm Jesus, your brother.

You meant it for evil. But God meant it for good. For the saving of many lives. That's the chapter we're working in, my friends.

And that's the finale I'm excited about. And we covet your prayers and your interest for CWI and Jewish mission.

You told him. That's the story. Zhao