

Luke 2:32

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Preacher: Paul Morris

[0 : 00] I think every nation has something it mentions with pride, however undeveloped that nation may be in Western terms, whatever, every nation has something, doesn't it, by which they can say, look at this, we're proud of this. Of course some things are very obvious, think of a country like India, very proud of the Taj Mahal, the thinking or political influence of Gandhi. You think of China, well if you saw the Olympics there you could see what they were proud of, particularly writing and things like that. The USA is proud of its Bill of Rights and Thomas Jefferson and Russia is proud of their royal palaces and Pushkin. The UK, well they're proud of something today I suppose and around this time. Centuries of architecture that people come from all over the world to wander around and look at these strange old buildings that we have and well William Shakespeare I suppose you could mention as one famous person, many others. What about Israel? What about the nation of Israel?

What do they hold up before the world as something that they're proud of? Well Israel of course has Jesus. Israel has Jesus, the Son of God and when you look at it like that all the nation's greats really pale into insignificance, don't they? They don't look particularly great at all, they've all got feet of clay, weaknesses of one sort or another, they had high ideals and were often not quite achieving them. What could be more glorious? To think of your national identity and the nation you belong to and think the very Son of God came as part of that nation and could say of himself that he was a Jew, would say to the Samaritan woman, we know what we worship. We the people of Israel, he identified, very much of course with his people. I want us to think around that theme this evening of Jesus as the glory of Israel, taking as my text from Luke chapter 2 and verse 32, the words of Simeon. I want us to think about Jesus as the glory of Israel, why the world should see him as glorious, the glory of Israel.

Israel. I want to think of the people of Israel and how they've made other choices by and large as to what they choose to be their glory of their nation. And then I want to finish by thinking about those I would call Israelites indeed who have chosen Jesus as the glory of Israel and for their salvation. First of all those words in Luke chapter 2 and verse 32, where Simeon in the temple, holding the baby Jesus, much to the astonishment and shock of his mother Mary and of Joseph, and takes hold of him, says various things and describes him as a light for revelation to the Gentiles. That's why we read Isaiah 49, because it speaks there of the Messiah, calling him actually Israel because he personifies everything that Israel was given to achieve in the world. He brings that about, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to or for your people Israel. Glory for your people Israel. I've never thought of it like that, that he brings glory to the nation of Israel. They are to see him as their glory and the most glorious thing that they have.

That's the way that Simeon saw things. He was one, of course, of a number of godly Israelites who, as I indicated earlier, were really living in the Old Testament at that time.

[4 : 07] It's New Testament to us, but they're living under the law of Moses, living in the land, waiting for the Messiah. And what a glorious thing that must have been for Simeon to have been, had it revealed to him, you're going to see the Messiah. That must have been exciting, mustn't it? They've been waiting those long centuries since they returned from Babylon, hundreds of years, and now that he's told it's happening now. There's that dear woman, Anna, who's spent all her time in prayer, surely praying for the coming of the Messiah much of the time. And the Lord, just as gracious to her, there's this prayerful woman who said, well, here's the answer to your prayers. He's come. And off she went to tell everybody all about it, all the prayer meetings, all the Bible studies, all the gathering in Jerusalem.

She was going to let them know he's here. It'll be a few years before we see him doing his ministry. So it was exciting times for them. But that Simeon's view of things, of the coming of the Messiah,

you can see he has this sort of national and international hope, this particular and this universal. He focuses on the glory of Israel. This is going to be a, he is going to be a blessing to us.

But he's not some narrow-minded bigot who's only concerned for blessing on their little inward group. He has this vision for the whole world. And that's a godly Israelite. The Pharisees, just a stereotype and a poor stereotype that we often have of the religious Jew, of people just concerned for self-survival, not too concerned for the world, just wish it would go away so they can just keep righteous and that's it. No, the godly Israelite of the Old Testament wasn't like that at all. Far from it. The moment they're confronted with the thought of the Messiah, the world, revelation to the Gentiles. At last, these people caught in abominable darkness that they knew quite a bit about from the Romans around them. These people are going to see the light.

God is going to bless them. Their hearts went out for us to have that blessing. But we're going to focus particularly on the view or the thought of Israel, of this Messiah, this person is the glory of Israel. Now, I suppose when we think of Jesus in that respect, we think of him as the glory of the church. Of course, he is the glory of the church. That's whom we focus upon when we come here this evening, who leads us to God the Father. We rejoice in him.

We even boast in him in the right sort of way. But the church is not Israel. Israel is not the church. We've inherited many blessings, all the promises that God gave to Israel of that spiritual nature.

[6 : 49] But there's only one ethnic group in the world called Israel that has Jesus born among them. That is the Jewish people. It's so then, and it is so today.

Now, in thinking about this matter of being glorious, the glory of your people Israel, presumably someone's got to agree with that. Not just people like Simeon, who believed, but he obviously sees him as something we can boast of in the eyes of the world. Let's put it that way for a moment. So what sort of things might we expect that the world would take notice of?

Obviously salvation, but not everybody believes in him. Things to do with salvation, things not to do with salvation, perhaps. The people would look at Jesus and admire that in their better moments, I suppose. I want us to just think about those for a while. I want us to think about, briefly, about five characteristics of Jesus in that way. Jesus' teaching that honoured the law, particularly, of course, the Sermon on the Mount. What nation has not admired, in their better moments, the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount? People often quote it, don't they? Say, well, I'm not sure I want all your Christian doctrine, but just give me the Sermon on the Mount. That we can live by.

Well, that's being a bit wishful and hopeful, but people can see that. Open-minded Jews will admire the way that the law has been expounded by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, those who have read it.

And other religions, we'll know, have admired it. Someone like Gandhi, who sought to use the principles of the Sermon on the Mount to mould his political philosophy. And many others have done things like that. Jesus' influence stretches well into the world beyond those who particularly believe in him.

[8 : 45] And in that way, he's a glory to his people before the world. His wise dealings with people. His sitting where they sat. His speaking to their situation. Think of the man who's sick of the palsy, who's lowered down through the roof amongst that crowd of people. His friend's desperate to get him there. And Jesus says to him, rise up and walk. Well, no, actually he didn't straight away, did he?

He said, your sins are forgiven. Now he may have had a slightly provocative purpose in that, in addressing those around who were somewhat negative towards him. But more than that, he's addressing the man's need. He's wise, he's sensitive, he understands as the Son of God and the Son of Man. This particular person, and he addresses that need. He's not so much interested in Shazam, look what I can do, I can heal somebody. But you, in your need, to know that your sins are forgiven. His wise dealings, his sensitive dealings with people. You know, the greats of the nations are very often the opposite of that, aren't they? Being able to achieve greatness usually, but not always, involves insensitivity to others and pushing them to one side to arrive at that position.

In that respect, Jesus is certainly a glory to his people in the eyes of the world. His miracles, his miracles are not there for just sensation, are they? Because when that was the case, when people saw them that way, he turned away and went elsewhere. But they're part of that great task to reverse the curse. They were things that were done to help. The dead were raised, usually, when you read of those occasions, for the sake of those still living. The impaired, we might say, those who couldn't see, those who couldn't speak, those who couldn't hear, etc., restored to a proper

humanity, healed. The effects of the curse temporarily removed from their lives.

The demonized, delivered to be themselves rather than controlled by some outside vicious force upon them. What teacher of Israel, or in any land, had done anything like that? Well, you could mention a few in Israel that had certainly worked some miracles, but day in, day out, you read some of those accounts in the Gospels, and at certain days it seemed to be all day long people were coming, thronging him, all being healed. It must have been remarkable to be there, to see this wonderful exhibition of grace and love and the reversal of the curse for the blessing of mankind pointing to that great reversal that would come in the new heavens and the new earth. What other nation has had something, a period of history like that, with someone doing those things among them?

It's never happened. These things happen. Anybody got any doubts here this evening, whether they happened? They happened. They took place. You don't just invent stories like this. I think it was Einstein who said of Jesus. You don't invent Jesus. His personality and everything about him jumps out of the page. It pulsates with life. Rousseau said something similar about Jesus. It had to have happened. You just couldn't invent the story. Glorious things that took place around him that are the glory of his people when viewed in that way. His truthfulness to his opponents. He spoke what people needed to hear. We are very familiar with spin, aren't we? Well, that's really how you ought to see what I said. It didn't quite seem to mean that. I didn't mean it to come out that way. Let me just turn it and get you to look at it another way. And we're so familiar with just trying to interpret what do they really mean by that. Nobody ever said that of Jesus, except rather some of the parables and so on, that he spoke. When he was addressing moral issues and the way people behaved, they knew what he was saying.

[13:01] They even commended him, despite not really liking him at times, that he spoke the Word of God. He spoke in truth. How often can that be said of the famous sons of our nation and of other nations, that you would always commend them for plain speaking and speaking the truth? Why did he do it? Well, he's not intent on his survival. Other people usually are, and so they hedge the truth. But he's not intent just on his survival. He's intent on our salvation. He speaks the truth, whatever the cost might be to him. But finally, perhaps this comes a little bit more closely home to the whole matter of salvation. He gave his life for others. He gave his life for others. You know, this holds all sorts of people, doesn't it? Not just Christians who understand the deeper meaning of his death, but it holds all sorts of people. You know, you think of the novels that get written and the recurring themes that come through and grip people. It's love, isn't it? It's fear, of course, but it's particularly the one that self-sacrificing love. The person who gives their life for other people, grips people, whether it's in films, dramas, stories, whatever it is. It holds people. Israel's prophets sometimes forfeited their lives for the truth. And other men and women have done such, haven't they? In war, people have given their lives sacrificially. But how often do people do that, as I might say, in cold blood? In other words, they calculate it. They work it out in advance. Usually it's done in the flush of the moment, of heroism, and good for them, a great heroic thing. But to work it out and plan it, I'm going to give my life, that's what I'm going to do. Well, Charles Dickens tried to portray it in *A Tale of Two Cities*, didn't he? Modeling it on Jesus, hoping to inspire people to greater things.

But it was fiction. It wasn't fact, and it doesn't happen too often. But it happened through Jesus. And of course, whenever it did happen for others, none of them endured what he endured.

Some of them went bravely to their deaths. Jesus, by comparison, might appear to have gone rather pathetically to his death in the Garden of Gethsemane, weeping, crying to God to deliver him if it's possible. He looks rather weak by comparison. Well, that's because he's not just going to be physically executed, is it? That's because he's going to spiritually bear the wrath of God against us. He's going to suffer separation from his Father, which he had never experienced or known on the cross. As God visits upon him what we deserve for our sins, it's something that he viewed with total horror. But he went forwards into it, voluntarily, in cold blood, so to speak.

Those who admire someone dying for a cause will admire that. Can't help but do that. Those of us who understand the salvation purpose behind it don't just admire. We praise and we worship him and we trust him for that death upon the cross for us. I trust that. It's true of every one of us here this evening, that we've acknowledged our sins and seen and understood that that's what he was doing there, not just setting an example, but paying a penalty. My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?

Forsaken, bearing what we deserve and trust that we've put our trust in him for that because he showed us love that is immeasurable and that even those who don't quite understand the gospel sense is there.

[16:58] And for Israel, it happened among them, sadly, at the hands of some of their leaders. And when it's properly understood, it becomes the most glorious thing that could have ever happened by the son of a nation in the midst of a nation in its history.

Jesus, indeed, the glory of his people Israel.

But not all Israelis, not all Jewish people that we could talk to tonight and ask them, well, what's the most glorious thing you think of when you think of your people?

It's only a minority that's going to jump up and say, Jesus. Not many others are, in fact, going to say that. So if you ask them, what will they say? What will they pinpoint and say, that's what I'm proud of in our history, if you ask me. Let me mention just a few so it gives you an understanding. I'm sure you have it, but may add to that and may encourage that understanding in thinking about Jewish people.

First of all, I suppose similar to any nation, what I would call achievers and achievements. Of course, among the Jewish people, they have many claimants. You've only got to pick up a Jewish history book, when you pick up their Jewish chronicle that comes out every week, and there'll always be something about achievers and somebody achieving something. Well, that's natural enough, I suppose. But there's some pretty high achievers among them that have contributed great things to the world. I've already mentioned Einstein. It's an obvious example. We benefit in this country from the retailing skills of people like Marks and Spencers and Tescos, and we're beginning to benefit from Westfields, an Australian group run by Hungarian Jews. They're all started and to some degree still run in the retail sector by Jewish people. We've got the Olympics coming up. Perhaps there's not so many Jewish names in that, but there's certainly some. I suppose I think particularly of Mark Spitz, that was a few years ago when it came to swimming. When you think of the movies, you automatically think of Steve Spielberg.

[19:13] You think of chess. You think of Fischer and Kasparov and people like that. And you just go on. And they will go on and say, these things, these people have contributed great things. We're proud of them, and they've got reason to be. But for many, you think, why haven't they mentioned Jesus in there? Why haven't they mentioned Jesus amongst those great achievers? Hasn't he achieved more?

Hasn't the world taken more notice of him and know his name better than any of those names? But he doesn't get mentioned. In fact, it's interesting. I've got a book at home called the Jewish Catalogue with all sorts of information and all sorts of things. And you look up a section and it says, false messiahs. And there's a great list of them, of people at some point in the last 2,000 years particularly, who've jumped up and said, we need help, I'm it, follow me. And they've all had an ignominious end of one sort or another. The amazing thing is, Jesus isn't even in the list.

He doesn't even appear as a false messiah, let alone as a true messiah. So little is he pushed out of Jewish consciousness. So much, rather, is he pushed out of Jewish consciousness. Don't want to hear from him. What about the State of Israel? There's something, say, look at this.

Well, of course, many things have been achieved in the State of Israel. Its founders had high hopes. And as they began to establish and develop, particularly technologically, agriculturally, done some great things, involving a massive amount of hard work.

But the early Zionists actually thought it was going to be a light to the nations. They actually thought, as good socialist Zionists, that they were going to establish something that would say to the world, look, you've kicked us about for 2,000 years. We're now about to show you how to live. The kibbutzim and so on. And a way of living together as a community.

[21:07] High ideals, but gone the way of the world, hasn't it? Israel's no different to any other state. Has all its corruption, has its sort of mafia, has everything that goes wrong, has its struggle with the Palestinians leading to mistreatment, and so on and so forth. It's just gone the way of the world. When Rabin was assassinated, one of the ministers, Yossi Sarad, said, well, now we're like everybody else. We've assassinated our prime minister. Well, there's other ways in which they're like everybody else as well. So the State of Israel is not something that Israel can hold up the Jewish people and say, this is it. Because they realise it's just as flawed as every other state. Well, what about, and I'll finish on this one in terms of these options, really the law. The law. And this perhaps is the one that would unite more Jewish people in saying, look at this. Look at the law of

Moses. Secular Jews would say, look at the influence of the law of God. Well, the law of the Jews, they might say, but it's the law of God, upon the nations of the world. Go to the United Nations, and you find the words of Isaiah chiseled in stone, or is it concrete, outside the United Nations. They shall beat their swords into plowshares. We inspired that, so to speak, they might say. Came through the gospel influence, of course. And Orthodox Jews are very proud of the law of God, and live in the law of God. And this is the way of salvation for the world, etc. That is something that they would very strongly lift up and say, look at this. This is the way to live.

The law. But none of those things are to be compared, of course, with Jesus, with Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus the Messiah. And there are those Jewish people whom I'm calling Israelites indeed. People like Nathaniel, whom Jesus called that, used that phrase, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. There are those who would say, if you ask them, well, all that we're tolerably proud of in one way or another, that we've achieved, but really it pales into insignificance compared to Yeshua, compared to Jesus. They're believers in Jesus the Messiah. I would be happy to call them the Israel of God, God's ones in the people of Israel. And right throughout history, my friends, I'm sure you're aware of this through what you've read, perhaps in the CWI magazine or something, there have always been some who have taken that view and have looked at Jesus and said, the glory of your people Israel.

Obviously, in the early days, Pentecost and so on, thousands come into faith in sermons and in a way that's never happened since in history, in the conversion of Jews in those very early days. Going out into, among the Gentile world with Paul and Jews always come into faith and things seeming to dip, but never being lost. You can even read accounts in the medieval period, in the dominance of Roman Catholicism in the Western Church, when there were times when prominent Jewish people, rabbis, were converted and came to faith and had a true and a living faith. But when you come into the 19th, 20th, 21st century, things really began to increase simply because the power of the gospel spreading in many parts of the world. Jews hearing, Jews believing, as they came into contact with the gospel. And that's going on to this day. The Lord does not leave himself without a witness. When we were in Australia, I met many Jewish Christians. Most of them had not come to faith through the activities of missions, but simply meeting Christians like you and me, weren't particularly experts or anything, but shared their testimony and God spoke through that testimony and they came to faith. There is a remnant according to the election of grace and they're being brought in by God, being saved. And when their eyes are opened, yes, there's many things about their people that they're proud of and they stick with their people and they suffer with their people. But as an example among their people, they say, yes, the great glory is that Jesus is the glory of Israel. Pray for them. Pray for their testimony among their people, that they would stay strong. All the pressures that you read about in the book of Hebrews seek to push them back into Judaism. They're there. They're very real. Pray for them that they'll be strong.

They're a testimony to their family and friends and see those come to faith and join with us here in churches like this, worshipping together as the one new man in Jesus Christ.

[26 : 12] We're going to sing again.