

K-532 Israel and the Apocalypse (1 of 3)

by Art Katz

The Church and Israel are two forms and aspects of one inseparable community, connected through Jesus Christ, and the Church's failure to see its relatedness to Israel leads to a lack of understanding of itself and its witness.

Duration: 39:37

Scripture: Isaiah 2:2, Isaiah 60:1, Haggai 2:7, Matthew 6:33, John 17:21, Romans 8:17, Ephesians 2:6

Topics: "Apocalypse"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on various topics related to the preaching of the word of God. They discuss the cry and need for God, the redemption offered through Him, and the importance of knowing Him. The speaker also touches on the history of Israel and their sacrificial practices, referencing Isaiah 53. They express a deep pessimism about mankind's ability to solve the problems of the 20th century and emphasize that the only hope for humanity lies in recognizing God. The sermon concludes with a mention of the invisible cloud of witnesses and the inseparable community of Israel and the Christian church.

Transcript

I wonder if you're interested to hear a little theological reflection that probably would just go over the heads of many about the invisible cloud of witnesses. Just to give you an idea of how a theologian reflects, I was impressed with this by Carl Barth. So don't get flustered if you don't follow it or it sounds strange, but try and flow and see how this man ponders and reflects and sees applications that many do not ordinarily consider.

If it does speak to your spirit, it could be a real illumination, a real opening of something of a productive kind. And it has to do with the invisible cloud of witnesses, which Carl Barth sees in continuum with the Church. He talks about the Church militant and the Church triumphant.

The Church triumphant are those who have already passed on. The Church militant is the Church presently in the earth. But he sees them both as one Church.

And those that have gone on before us are, of course, connected with the conclusion of the Church in the earth, but they contribute to it. So let me just read something of this. Isn't that a remarkable thing? Talk about seeing by the eye of the Spirit.

Someone prayed this morning about being liberated from our categories, bringing the eternal perspective to bear now. That's exactly what he's doing. He's going through conventional categories, and he's seeing that the Church that has passed on, that though it is invisible, it's present and belongs to the communion of the saints.

It is not only the living who speak and act, but their predecessors. Their words, their works, their history does not end with their departure, but on their departure, often only then enters its decisive stage among their successors. You know who I gave this to? A lady on her deathbed.

A precious intercessor to encourage her and to show her that if the Lord would be pleased to take her, it's not the end of her ministry, but the release of her ministry into yet another phase of activity, perhaps yet even more significant than when she was among the living, so to speak. Let me read that again. It's not only the living who speak and act, but their predecessors, those who have come before.

Their words and works, their history, which does not end with their departure, but on their departure, often only then enters its decisive stage among their successors. That's when you can say, death, where is your victory? And grave, where is your sting? That you're, oh boy, the devil got away and he took one of God's choice saints, or how is it that this one was taken so early? It may well be it's not a sense of loss, but a sense of gain for the Church, because upon the taking and coming into the realm of the things that are invisible, that there is an influence exerted from that place to those that are living and in the earth that is more profound than what they would have exerted had they remained living. Can you sense that? They stand in an indissoluble relationship with the present, whether we are aware of it or not.

This didn't wait for us to come to the awareness in order to be vital. It's been vital all along, but it's good to be aware of things as God establishes them. The triumphant Church is with Christ, who is the head of the body.

It takes part in the glory which is still hidden from the Church in the earth, because it is with Him and in the midst of it. The Church that has passed on, that is part of that invisible cloud, is with the Lord in glory. They are already in the place that is beyond time.

They are already in the eternal future. They are already tasting of the age to come. But see, if they are already in the place of glory, what kind of influence then do they exert for us who are yet locked in time and place? They bring something of the aura and the sense of that future thing presently to bear as influence upon us.

It's like someone who has already crossed the finish line and now encouraging those who are struggling to make it to come through, because they know the glory and the joy that awaits the triumph of finishing. You see what I mean? And how is it that we're connected with them? Because we have a living head. The one who is our head is also theirs.

And that this influence that they exert, which is in an invisible realm and we hardly know how to assess it, is something actively and not merely passive, and it impels those that are yet in the earth toward its completion. This is, what do you call this? This is theological contemplation of what does the invisible cloud of witness mean. And very little is said about it.

In fact, other than that reference in Hebrews, I don't know of another place where they are referred to. But that's enough to suggest that there's a realm there that is real, and this is theological reflection on that little

bit given in Scripture about what it might mean, that that presence impels towards completion those that are yet in the earth. This means that a saint who is taken is not lost to the purposes of God, but rather continues from another sphere to be engaged in his purposes, even or at least as significantly as before.

That means the devil can't win. That means that there's nothing lost to God, that what is removed from the earth is merely just brought into another realm of activity affecting what goes on in the earth, perhaps even more profoundly from that place than it did before. So the enemy cannot win, and even death, where the Lord allows it, is employed strategically in his purpose and glory.

So through the triumphant church that has already gone before us, the church that's in the earth, the militant church, has its spearhead in the sphere of completion. These people, this invisible cloud is already in the realm of eternal glory. They're in the place beyond time, and they bring something of that aura and that sense.

They are a spearhead of it to the church that's in the earth, moving it toward that same conclusion. Therefore the church which was and the church which is are very concretely one church, all live unto him, not only on that side but on this, not only on this side but on that, and because they all live unto him, they are one community. This is a remarkable way of seeing, and all of that is a preparation now for a shifting of gears to introduce the subject of Israel.

For the same reason, the people of Israel in its whole history and the Christian church are two forms and aspects of one inseparable community. First he talks about the invisible cloud of witnesses, the church triumphant, being related to the church militant in the earth as one community, and then he shifts gears and says if that's true of that, then it's also true that Israel and the church are in God's sight, one community. Two forms and aspects but one inseparable community in which Jesus Christ has this earthly historical form of existence by which he is attested to the whole world, by which the whole world is summoned to faith in him.

Just take that last phrase, by which the whole world is summoned to faith in him. In other words, until there's a consciousness that the church is one community with Israel, and Israel is conscious of its connection with the church, that the world cannot be summoned rightly to faith in him. That there's a release of the reality of himself in a fullness and a power that comes when this inseparable community recognizes itself as being the same community and joined to the same head.

For the one it's the Messiah to come, for the other it's the present Lord, but it's the same head. See what joins the two as one community? The same thing that joins the invisible cloud of witnesses with the church and the earth, one head. The Lord stands like the pivot and the joining of the things invisible and the things present, of the nation Israel that does not yet recognize him and the church who does.

But whether it's recognized by man or not, the truth and the reality of it still prevail. But when the recognition comes, there could be something of the release of the power that summons the world to faith in him. He himself is the one person, the crucified Messiah of Israel, who as such is the secret Lord of the church, the risen Lord, and as such also is the Messiah of Israel.

So on the one hand there is the promise, on the other it's fulfillment. In its form as Israel, the community is still identified with the nation, the commonwealth of Israel. Does the church no longer know the beginning? Does Israel not know of its consummation? I'm not doing justice to this, but here's the inseparable community that does not recognize itself belonging to each other.

What is the church but those who were far off, without hope in the world and without God, who have been brought nigh by the blood of the Messiah into the commonwealth of Israel? Israel does not recognize the church as being that, and the church itself does not see itself as being that. And that's why there's been a sense of independence and separation of these two entities, the church and Israel, that is contrary to the way that God himself sees them. So he's raising the question, does the church no longer know the beginning? Does it not know what it's derived from and what it's related to and what it has been brought into? And then the question is to Israel, does Israel not know of its consummation? Does it not know that this church is something given by God to bring it to a place of God's intention? Not that it has been fulfilled, but it is the one history, it is the bow of the one covenant which stretches over the whole.

It is therefore essential to the church from the very beginning, and it always will be, to represent this unity in itself and to exist in it. I wrote consciously, the church needs to see the identity with Israel in a way that has not recognized it, because it has been competitive and even a deterrent to Israel, doesn't recognize its connectedness, and when it's most arrogant and conceited, it sees itself even as Israel's replacement. For only the church that sees itself rightly as related to Israel can attest to the whole world and summon faith in him.

He's always bringing us back to what is the practical consequence of being rightly related to Israel as God would see it. I wrote some remarks in here myself. Has the church in Germany seen that, still see that, and affirm that it would revolutionize its whole perception of itself, radicalize its message and its witness, its power and its glory? Is it not for the want of this that we languish and grope for panaceas and fads and gimmicks, because we sense that something is wanting and something is lacking? To deny this unity would be to deny Jesus Christ himself as the attestation of the one work and the one revelation of the one God, and hasn't the church in fact done this? The church fragmented because it has not seen its connection with Israel, and therefore it has its view of God and its view of itself is fragmented also.

It's not seen the unity that God intends. All of this came out of a discussion of the unity between the invisible church and the present church, and it's the same principle. It's an issue of seeing.

So this is theological reflection that I think is really stimulating. And where the church has taken Romans 9 through 11 seriously, it has not been able to escape or explain away the fact that its unity in this sense is compromised by the existence of a Judaism which does not believe in Jesus Christ. More than anything else, this makes its own existence problematical.

The existence of the synagogue side by side with the church is an ontological impossibility. It's a contradiction in terms. If these are unities that God intended, then the very existence of a synagogue as a separate religious institution from the church down the block is a contradiction in terms.

It's a wound. It's a grievous statement that both the church and Israel have not seen their unity and their connectedness, and because it has not seen it, it makes its own existence problematical. The church is not the church until it really sees its relationship with Israel.

And he calls this a wound, a gaping hole in the body of Christ, something which is quite intolerable. We have not seen and anguished over this, and therefore we have allowed a kind of pluralism into the world. This is my own comments that I'm adding.

If God intended a union and an oneness of that which pertains to Israel and that which is the church, and we've allowed them to become fragmented and separated and become independent institutions, we've

opened the door for the existence of other independent religious institutions. It makes the way for religious pluralism in the world. There are consequences set in motion because we have not seen what God intends that we should have seen about the relationship between the church and Israel.

And so he's saying the very allowance of the synagogue is a contradiction, as if it has a valid existence independent from and other than the church. When they have the same head, they are related to the same God, the same Messiah, is the anticipation for the one and the Lord over the other. So it's just a way of seeing, a way of viewing that he's trying to communicate.

If we have not been serious in this, have we been serious in anything, is my own question. The decisive question is not what the Jewish synagogue can be without him, but what the church is, as long as it allows a separate, hostile and alien Israel. Jewish missions is not the right word for the call to remove this breach.

It's not enough just to talk about Jews being saved. This is a much deeper question. This is the bringing together authentically the union that God himself intended from the first and it would take a remarkable re-seeing of itself, of the church, to see that it's not independent of the Jew and of Israel, but in a continuum and one body, one house, so to speak, in the same way that the church needs to see, the church and the earth needs to see itself as one with those who have gone on before it.

Again, a matter of seeing. And you're not going to solve this by just talking about a mission to the Jews. It's something much more than an evangelistic thing that's required.

It's a radical bringing together of what is now something broken and disjointed. What a dreadful thing, he says, when the church itself has so little understood its own nature, that it has not only withheld this knowledge from its brethren, its Jewish brethren, but made it difficult, if not impossible, for them. The Jewish question, he asks, is it not really the Christian question? And how has it been historically answered? Not by integration, but by annihilation, and now threatening so again.

This is so necessary for the church's own understanding of itself, calculated to save it from triumphalism through humbling, not only to affect its witness to the Jew, but everyone. It's a humbling thing for the church to see itself, not as some independent entity separated from Israel, but part of the same thing that God, of the one thing that God intends. And that this humbling would be a virtue for the church, not only in its witness to the Jew, but its witness anywhere.

Remember Paul said, I would not have you to be ignorant of this mystery, lest you become wise in your own conceit. In Romans 11. Something is lost to the church when it fails to see its relatedness to the Jew.

It's humbling for the church that has seen itself as Israel's successor to see itself as being in continuum and being related to Israel. And it's that seeing and that humbling which affects the character of the church to make its witness to the Jew more powerful, but its witness anywhere. I'm a Jew by birth, but before my conversion, I was as much a Jew spiritually as a stone.

Remember he said, of these stones, if my disciples will not cry out, these stones will cry out. So what I'm getting at is that there's a dimension and a quotient of something that has been lost to the church that would really make the church significantly the church. Yet to miss it spiritually and to think to apprehend it culturally is equally to miss it.

It's not a cute overlay or something that we do because we like the music and that kind of thing. It's a spiritual thing. I don't even like to use the word, it's not Jewish.

The word Jewish itself is almost a generic term of exilic life, which is the statement of our life under the judgment of God. That's why we're born in Brooklyn and Moscow and other places. But there's something original.

I think that this is what this German theologian is feeling for. And I thought it worthwhile enough to share with you. Okay, that's just the four spice.

That was just to wet your whistle and to encourage your own reflection and to have a greater sense of respect and esteem for the invisible cloud of witnesses who are not just passive onlookers but actually convey or confer and bring a dimension from the eternal realm where they already are into our present in ways that we cannot perhaps identify or of which we're not even conscious. We might be receiving that assist even now and not knowing it. But God knows that we need that assist.

But it would be good to be conscious because the world has compartmentalized us. We agree with them. We separate the sacred and the secular.

We separate eternity and time. We separate the profane and the holy, which, by the way, condemns everything finally to becoming profane. God wants the penetration of the holy into the profane.

He wants the penetration of the eternal into the present. He wants the sacred into the secular. So that's how naive I was as a young believer returning to the teaching profession that I didn't realize that I was now in a secular setting and you were not to communicate to students in an American history class things pertaining to salvation or a world history class.

I just did it. You know, where do you draw the line? Where do you say that this is a subject matter? It's all life. It's all reality.

It's all the issue of eternity. And indeed, students were being saved in my class. I remember on one occasion, I gave an altar call.

Seventeen kids raised their hands and received the Lord. And the Lord said, how do you say it? If you'll not come to me, I'll come to you. And it came out of a discussion of problems coming right up out of world history and what is the solution.

Is there a solution? And the cry and the need for God and the redemption and do we know him? And remember when we talked about the history of Israel and they performed sacrifice and then I picked up Isaiah 53 and I read it and ended up giving an invitation. Or I give a review for the end of the year and we come to the 20th century having surveyed world history from its inception and I have a great question mark on the blackboard, atomic annihilation, cultural collapse, moral decay, and I would say to the students, I wish I could end the year on an encouraging note and say that I have hope for mankind that we will have learned from history and bring the wisdom of the past to bear on our present problems but I have to say that I would be not truthful to indicate that that I have the deepest pessimism about the ability of man to resolve the dilemmas of this final century and that the only hope for mankind is the recognition of God alone. And I go on like that and then the bell would ring and the class would empty out and I'm picking up my papers and I hear psst, psst, psst and I'm looking and there's a kid who has come back he's trembling like a leaf in the hallway Mr. Cassius said, what must I do to be saved? And I go out in the hallway and I pray with him and well you can realize by the end of that school year I had been invited up to the principal's office four times with complaints largely from Christian parents.

Isn't that ironic? That their kids were getting so radicalized that their parents were afraid that they were not going to go on to college and to split-level successes. So we're on to a great mystery, saints. Always has been and the Church will not be the Church if it continues in its ignorance or indifference to this mystery will not see and will not embrace what is its designed and intended mandate by God and all the more in the last days when Israel in its own preparation for its millennial destiny and glory must necessarily first pass through the severest dealings of God.

And that's what is on my heart this morning. And I want to begin just by taking a chapter in the book of Prophets in Isaiah chapter 60 because I think that though we could have chosen many other texts in fact once your spiritual eye is open you're going to see things in the Prophets that will just cry out it will shriek at you. You'll wonder how you've never seen it before it is so apparent that speaks one great theme Israel's restoration in the last days out of great struggle, great adversity, great trial judgment in exact proportion to its own sins but out of which comes a surviving remnant through whom the glory of God is established in their restoration.

And it even in veiled ways shows that there is an agent in the earth appointed by God to be the incisive instrument in facilitating Israel's being brought through which is not Israel itself but another sometimes described as Zion that when Zion will travail a nation will be born in a day and in my opinion clearly it's a statement of the last days church that has seen its calling and has come to a place of such sanctification and stature as to be to Israel what it must because Israel has and always will be till its own transformation be the most trying and vexing testing of the church that could be.

That's God's intention it has always been so and the church has never responded graciously to Israel for that reason it has been vexed and threatened by an Israel that even in its darkness has been able to see through the church's foibles and weaknesses and defects. The church's severest critic is the Jew and so many great church fathers of the apostolic fathers Chrysostom who was called the golden mouthed orator was an anti-Semite he railed against the Jews because they railed against him they railed against the church of which he was a bishop and he did not have the grace and the magnanimity to understand the frustration of the Jews and their offense at the Gentiles who were handling their scriptures and bringing forth conclusions from it that they could not see and did not understand that they were in fact performing a vital function in being a thorn in the church's side a more modern illustration of the same kind of thing of a great church father who failed in this one place is Luther he's the one who restored the lost doctrines of grace and of faith and yet had not the grace toward Israel and toward the Jew that God makes as an ultimate test of our own sanctification and so there's yet another final test coming and I remember I shared this at the Lutheran seminary and some student cried out and said are you saying that God is calling us in the last days to a sanctification greater than what Luther himself had?

I said, thou speakest it's exactly that so you can see something of the mystery already that somehow in the wisdom of God he has made inseparable and co-joined two entities that have been historically at enmity with each other and even in their ignorance and separation not recognizing this mystery purposes are served without which neither the one nor the other attains to their millennial destiny or glory the Jew and the Gentile Israel and the church it's as if God it's not an accident of the differences that have kindled antagonism but that the antagonism flows out of the very differences that God himself has established like male and female and he calls them to be one or the Jew and the Gentile to be made into one new man is the mystery of the church so we have to have a certain taste

and feeling for these mysteries which God himself has established which are so extraordinary in their exclusiveness and opposition and antagonism that it would take the extraordinary grace of God to affect the reconciliation which was the principal act of God at the cross the church so transfigured so sanctified that by it itself is fitted for its millennial destiny namely not to pluck a harp on a cloud but to rule and reign with Christ from heavenly places so I'll try to elaborate on that later that's why this is so extraordinary and that's why if this is true and Israel is God's intended challenge to sanctification for the church it's finishing school so to speak and we omit that or circumvent that because we're repelled or because we're afraid or because we're intimidated or

disinterested we void ourselves as being a church prepared for its own millennial and eternal destiny so that's the way that I see it okay now let's read this Isaiah 60 arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you for behold darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples but the Lord will rise upon you and his glory will appear upon you and nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising now I know that the church has many times employed this text for itself but I believe that that's a mistake and it's God's intention that this mean that the Zion and that what is rising from darkness upon which his light will shine is the nation itself Israel as I believe the rest of the text will indicate does that mean that we

can never use verses like this in our preaching to encourage the saints you can so long as you make clear that this is not the first and explicit literal intent of God but a secondary application to make your preaching point which many have not seen or done lift up your eyes round about and see they all gather together they come to you your sons will come from afar and your daughters will be carried in the arms then you will see and be radiant and your heart will thrill and rejoice because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you the wealth of the nations will come to you a multitude of camels will cover you the young camels of Midian and Ephaph all those from Sheba will come they will bring gold and frankincense and will bear good news of the praises of the Lord all the flocks of

Cedar will be gathered to you the rams of the Bayot will minister to you they will go up with acceptance on my altar and I shall glorify my glorious house we just need to pause at that reference to my glorious house you might want to just take down some other scriptural references that refer to it like Haggai chapter 2 verses 7 and 9 Isaiah 2 maybe we can just so long as we're in the book of Isaiah turn quickly to that somebody might want to look up Haggai Haggai it may well be very much the same verse the same scripture in Isaiah 2 now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains will be raised above the hills all nations will scream to it and many peoples will come and say come let us go up to the

mountain of the Lord to the house of the God of Jacob that he may teach us concerning his ways that we might walk in his paths it's referred to in Ezekiel 37 and in other places and in Zechariah that the house is both the sanctuary the dwelling place and the locus of government of the millennial kingdom of God so this is no small thing that's being referred to this is the house on the mountain exalted above other mountains it's the highest place of authority it's called the house because it's the dwelling place of God but that's why the law shall go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem he will make Israel and Jerusalem itself his sanctuary his dwelling place and the locus of his world government and dominion that's why Psalm 2 says let the heathen rage and imagine a

vain thing but God will hold them in disdain for I have set my king upon the holy hill of Zion so this reference to a house here is that kind of reference it's glorious because he occupies it and it's not a house

he would occupy in a land that is not restored to him or a people who are not restored something has got to happen and to transfigure both the people and the land but as I hope to show you what precedes that is extraordinary devastation and purging by fire that may be why when your sons come from afar and your daughters will be carried in the arms you will see and be radiant because it's a veiled prophetic picture of people who are returning from captivity that have been lost to their parents through the violent seizure that will take place in Israel in a time soon or yet to come

but the Lord will return such of them as constitute his remnant and with that the wealth of nations as well because Israel is going to suffer destitution, devastation physical violence, defeat famine and all the kinds of things that are now being returned in great measure and abundance as the nations shower this restored people with their wealth and with their goods gold and frankincense and camels and all of these things are symbolic Hebraicisms biblical rhetoric that will have their modern day equivalent in goods and services because Israel will be the predominant nation of the world as much now as it harasses the world threatens the world's security it will now be looked upon as a transfigured nation and nations will scream to it they'll come up to the house of the God of Jacob and

those nations that will not come will suffer a curse if they still continue to zealously hold their ancient prejudices and will not bow their necks to the work of God because there's something humbling for gentile nations to defer to this Jewish nation that has now made a golden headband, what do you call it? a crown, a trophy there's another biblical word a diadem in the hand of their God then they'll suffer for that they have got to bow and to acknowledge what God has established you see what it does? it flies into the very face of all that is human and the first cry that will come up from mankind and even from a carnal church is, they don't deserve it look, they've been against God and they're ungodly, look what they've done and look at their... and now all of a sudden they're restored

and despite them and God has graciously bestowed and he's made his sanctuary in their midst and he's called them my people and that they will be the ambassadors of that kingdom to the nations they don't deserve it what is that a statement of? yes, it's a people who have not known the grace of God you see, God's dealing with Israel in the last days is the final revelation of himself I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy and what will more accurately demonstrate that than the nation who least deserves and what is mercy if deserving is the qualification for it mercy by definition is the grace heaped on that which is undeserving because God is who he is and he cannot help himself and he says, I'm going to do this before the face of all nations I'm not going to do this in a corner why?

because this is my testimony to all nations that not only will Israel know that I am the Lord who has done this but you will know it and if you refuse then to bow to me then the last thing is the judgment on the nations he begins with his own house judgment begins in the house of God but then it will go also to the nations and if God will not spare Jerusalem if God will not spare Haifa and Tel Aviv and Jaffa and all of the cities and developments that have come up in the last 40 years what nations will he spare who despise this demonstration of his grace

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