

Engage360 Ep 100 | Christian Nationalism; David Ritchie

Intro Welcome to engage 360 Denver Seminary's Podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.

Don Payne Welcome to Engage 360 at Denver Seminary. I'm your host, Don Payne. And before we dove into our current episode, I want to let you know that this is actually our 100th episode. And we're deeply grateful for the opportunity to have had an incredible array of conversations about an equally impressive diversity of topics over the past three years or so since we began. Whether you've been listening to us from the very beginning or picked up with us somewhere along the way, I hope you've found something in our interviews that encourages you, something that prompts you to deeper learning about a subject, something that gives you some theological perspective, and something that resources you to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life changing truth of scripture, because that's our mission here at Denver Seminary. So, thanks for investing some of your valuable time with us, hopefully on a regular basis. If you're a current student at Denver Seminary, frankly, I'm impressed that you would take the time to listen to yet another voice from the seminary. But really, I hope that you find this to be a meaningful and helpful augmentation to your studies. If you're a graduate of Denver Seminary, I hope this is a meaningful way for you to stay connected to your alma mater. If you're a supporter of Denver Seminary, thank you for your generosity and helping us continue our mission. And if you have another kind of relationship with us or simply heard about us, we want to serve you as well. Wherever you are in the world and whatever God is giving you to do to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the Gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture in your place. So please communicate with us if you have comments, questions, or suggestions. Our email address is podcast@DenverSeminary.edu. Before we get into our 100th episode, I want to say a special word of thanks to Andrea Weyand, our senior director of Communications for her wise and strategic guidance of our themes and our guests. And to Christa Ebert, who faithfully and oh so competently records and edits each episode. I really wish that you could meet these delightful colleagues of mine and enjoy them personally, but at least you get to benefit from their incredible gifts. So, with all that, here's our latest conversation. Thanks again for listening, friends.

Don Payne Hello again, friends from Denver Seminary. You know, from tweets to talk shows, from published monographs to memes, media of every sort these days are charged with inflammatory exchanges, at the core of which are powerful assumptions and powerful values about what it means to be a citizen of the United States. Now, that's true of other nations as well, but the American version of it seems to be pretty intense right now and garners lots of international attention right now for good or for ill. And these assumptions and these values are sometimes explicit, and they're sometimes implicit in all types of controversies. But these assumptions and values drive the conversations all the same. So the question we want to entertain today is what does it mean to be a citizen, particularly a faithful and loyal citizen of this country? Now, if we isolate our focus on confessing Christian communities, both conservative and progressive, we frequently see the intriguing phenomenon of those national commitments being aligned with or being assumed to be synonymous with Christian faith commitments. And that kind of sets the stage for a discussion we want to have today about the subject of nationalism. And our guest for that discussion has recently written a quite bold book on the subject, looking at nationalism through the lens of the gospel. David Ritchie is our guest and is the author. David, welcome to the podcast.

David Ritchie Thank you, Dr. Payne. I'm honored to be with you today.

Don Payne David's book, which we will dive into here in just a moment, is entitled *Why Do the Nations Rage: The Demonic Origin of Nationalism*. Why do the nations rage. So we'll dive into this. First, let me introduce you to David a little bit more. David is the lead pastor at Redeemer Christian Church in Amarillo, Texas. And as a sidebar, I'm going to put in a little plug for Amarillo. Those of you who may know Amarillo, know where it is. Some of you listeners in different parts of the country may know nothing about Amarillo. Many have probably driven through it. And I know from many of the folks in Amarillo, they're accustomed to people going through Amarillo, but not to Amarillo. I think that's safe to say, isn't it, David, isn't that kind of the line in the region?

David Ritchie I believe so. We're basically the gateway to the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

Don Payne Yeah. But I love Amarillo and would really encourage any of you who happened to be driving through there on I-40 to stop because you get to know the city and it really is a great place. They have a surprisingly good food scene. I mean, it's kind of a little foodie town in my estimation. They've got a great coffee scene there, just lots of good stuff going on there in the middle of the high plains in the Texas panhandle. David, tell us a little bit about yourself and your ministry at Redeemer Christian Church.

David Ritchie Certainly. I love this city. I love Amarillo, Texas. This is where I was born and raised. This is where my family's from. On one side of my family, I actually go back five generations, which is about just as long as there have been permanent settlements in this part of the country.

Don Payne You're right.

David Ritchie And so it's a place that I hold near and dear to my heart. And I became a Christian a little bit later in life, actually, as I was in college and as I began to discern a call to ministry, one of the later things that woke up was just a true desire to love, to serve this community, and to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ where the Lord has placed me. And I have the privilege of pastoring a church named Redeemer Christian Church. Originally, it was planted as West Emerald Christian Church in 1927. It's an older congregation. And through the course of the years, it had successes. It was a successful church planting church, a vibrant church at one point in time. But then it did go through a period of decline and decay. And so I became what we call a church re-planter. And I got to see the extraordinary journey of seeing a church that was truly on the verge of death come to life yet again, to be able to flourish, and by God's grace, be able to not just grow, but to be able to be a blessing to this city. And so I love this church. I've been here for a little bit more than ten years. So we just celebrated our ten year anniversary in 2021 in November, and we have a lot of evidences of God's grace with us.

Don Payne Yeah, you do. And I'll say I've visited your congregation and worshiped there and would really encourage listeners any time they happen to be in Amarillo to stop in and worship at Redeemer. I think you'll be blessed. You really will. So, David, you have published this book on nationalism, and while there's just a lot to talk about here, but maybe in a general sense, first, what prompted you to write this book? Because it is a pretty bold argument.

David Ritchie It is. And it is also a sincere argument. It's a work that I consider to be a piece of pastoral theology. Essentially doing ministry in West Texas, over the course of the years, I've seen just a growing sense of really political extremism and something that began to change in my heart,

especially as we underwent all the pressures that the pandemic and that season of just political division really exposed in us was this tendency that I was finding disturbing among people who are professed Christians, but nevertheless, they seemed to be more animated and passionate about issues of politics and the kingdom of man as opposed to the Gospel. So much so that I was noticing this disturbing feature in my community, where I would just notice people that I love, people that are my neighbors, people that are my friends more passionately and more naturally be able to argue for and persuasively present a vision for a kingdom of man, but nevertheless seemed to be, I felt like noticeably silent on matters of the Gospel and essentially that same level of passion for Christ and his kingdom seemed to not be very present. But as that situation began to emerge and merge, I began to complete my master's level thesis project and I decided to essentially ask the question, What can Christian theology and what can the Word of God essentially allow us to see about nationalism and this phenomenon of nationalism that might not be as easily seen through the more typical lenses of study, for example, historical studies or political science or the field of sociology. And so I initially wanted to ask the question of how can we be able to furnish or at least begin to furnish biblical categories and theological categories to be able to understand this very fascinating and very impactful phenomenon that is such an animating force in our world.

Don Payne That's well said. Now, clearly, we're going to have to define some terms here as we go. So we'll loop back to that in a moment. But let me kind of read a brief excerpt from the early part of your book. You may want to comment on this because it really sets the stage for your book. You say, I write about nationalism because my experience as a pastor in the West Texas wilderness has led me to believe that nationalism, not atheism, not new age spiritualism, not any other traditional world faith, is the greatest religious rival of the Christian Gospel for the worship of the people whom I love and serve in my congregation, my broader community, and increasingly my nation. So you're seeing nationalism, again we'll have to define some terms here, but you're seeing this as intrinsically hostile, antithetical to life in the gospel. Is that fair?

David Ritchie Yes sir. And in fact, what I would say is, you know, a lot of this goes back to a reading that I recently did of a significant piece of theology, J. Gresham Machen's Christianity and Liberalism. And what I so appreciated about his critique is he was noticing that there are aspects of theological liberalism that utilize Christian language and Christian doctrines, Christian terminology, but they're then loaded with and packed with non-Christian ideas. And so basically, they use the suitcase, if you will, the packaging of Christian language, Christian ideas to be able to import something else that is fundamentally something different than the gospel. And as I was reading that and asking the question, you know, 100 years later, after Machen wrote, you know, I wondered what that would be. What is like Christianity and uses Christian language, but is not Christianity. And as soon as I asked the question what my pastoral experience is formulated me to answer almost immediately is it's nationalism or what we would now call Christian nationalism when it kind of takes on a Christian veneer, at least. And so I wanted to essentially unpack that and be able to describe in some ways how Christianity and nationalism are not just incompatible, but they really are rival religions. And one of the key arguments of the book is that I do believe that nationalism is better understood as a species of religion as opposed to a merely political ideology.

Don Payne Okay. All right. Well, some terms now. So when you use the the word nationalism, how are you defining that and how does that compare to patriotism?

David Ritchie I do early on make a key distinction between the terms nationalism and patriotism. And that's not a distinction that I make. That is a distinction that is really evident even in

nationalism studies and the body of literature that is written on nationalism. And so if we're going to try to maybe take a more theological or particularly Augustinian angle on this, I would describe patriotism as a good thing. It is a rightly ordered love for one's nation. It is a stewardship of the privilege of citizenship that we have in this nation. It is the ability to express on a public level, a love for one's neighbor that happens to be in this community of people that we define as a nation. Nationalism, on the other hand, is when that good love, when that natural love becomes distorted, when it twists into something that is idolatrous. And of course, any good thing that we exalt to an ultimate thing becomes an idol. It becomes something that essentially robs our worship and devotion that should be unto the Lord, and begins to take it for itself. And nationalism is not just a form of idolatry, but it's something that I would like to argue is one of the most enduring and alluring forms of idolatry that has existed throughout human history.

Don Payne Okay. Enduring because you see it in almost every human time period?

David Ritchie Exactly. Yeah. In fact, I would be of the perspective and there's, of course, scholars that have different opinions on this. I see nationalism as a phenomenon that is deeply ancient in its roots, not just from a biblical standpoint, but even from just a purely historical standpoint. There is this alluring capacity and this temptation to accord to the state a sense of divinity, a sense of ultimate value, and to conflate allegiance and devotion to the state with something that is more akin to worship, rather than just simply a natural devotion to one's nation and neighbors.

Don Payne You develop that in the book a bit, but for our listeners, maybe tease that out just a little bit. How do you see that getting expressed?

David Ritchie Yeah, absolutely. So one of the things that I do later on in this section of my book is I essentially take the major categories of the Apostles Creed, which furnish for us some of the the basic furniture of Christian theology, some of the major doctrines that seem to cut across all of the traditions of the historic Christian church. And so what I argue is that nationalism and its variegated and myriad forms will almost always attempt to utilize the categories of the Christian Gospel and then use it for its own advantage. And so, in fact, some of the research that I'm working on right now relates to particularly how redundant and how consistently different nationalist movements attempt to use messianic characterizations to be able to promote a leader or a certain type of leader for the nation. How, I mean, from the pharaohs of old to ancient Sumerian kings to even the Caesars of Rome, there's this tendency to almost exalt these type of figures as someone who is both inherently God, but also inherently man to bridge, you know, heaven and earth kind of through this political figure. There's even a tendency to even view these great leaders as someone who is nobly suffering for and sacrificing for the nation. And because of that, whenever we utilize messianic characterizations, anytime we're appealing to the category of Christology, it's not just eliciting a level of, yes, I would like to follow this guy or to support this individual. It's inherently speaking to our religious affections. It's trying to evoke from us this greater level of worship. And so one of the things just to be able to bring it down very specifically was I was very disturbed at how people were beginning to support President Donald Trump, not just as a president or as a political leader but were beginning to even describe him in messianic terms, using terms like the anointed one. There was a painting that I examine and discuss in my book by an artist named John McNaughton called You Are Not Forgotten. And it's a painting of President Donald Trump standing in front of the White House. He's surrounded by members of law enforcement and the United States military. And he's standing in front of this this couple, this blue-collar couple that are watering this plant that's coming out of dry ground. And as soon as you see the image of a root or a plant coming out of dry ground, that's a significant image because it

comes from Isaiah chapter 53. But even more significant is the fact that as the president stands there, his foot is on the head of a snake that apparently he has vanquished. And as soon as you see something like that, alarm bells go off on me as a pastor showing that this is crossing a line into something that's far more than just political adherence to a certain set of policies. This is ascribing messianic status, Christological import to support of one's president. And that means that when we impute some level of doctrine to a physical person, a lot of times it comes with more. And so, this person might even become infallible. Someone that's not able to err in our minds. And it elicits from the follower a sense of devotion that is best described as religious. And that's something that I see as competing with the devotion and the allegiance that is rightly due to Jesus Christ.

Don Payne That's really interesting, because even as I think about probably any Christian I know, they would never say that, you know, a public official president or otherwise is actually divine. They would, as far as I know, they would never say that what they look to from the nation, the state is salvific. But I think what you're pointing out, David, is that there are certain kinds of theological impulses or chords that get strummed along the lines of those grand doctrines. So, you know, when you talk about messianic language being used and kind of in messianic images and for us looking toward either leaders or parties or ideologies to do for us some of the things that should feel the same way as what only God can do for us. Then you're arguing that we're blurring that line and we're starting to cross over. Is that fair?

David Ritchie Absolutely. Yes, sir. And the thing about idolatry is, a lot of times you're not aware that you're engaging in it. Idols are seductive.

Don Payne Yeah, that's what makes them so powerful, right? They mask.

David Ritchie Exactly. And in a lot of times, too, it's in a reaction to a greater fear. And so one of the things that was really fascinating to me was studying a lot of nationalist movements in the lead up to World War Two. And how often times, like a guy like Benito Mussolini who receives actually the support and the sanction of the Roman Catholic Church, he receives that support. And there's even a pope of the time, I believe it was Pius the 11th, that describes him as a man who was sent by God's providence. The reason they accorded that to him is because at the time, his political ideology was the best opponent, if you will, of Marxism that was on the rise across Europe. There were a lot of nations at that time, including Germany, that were really afraid that something like the Bolshevik Revolution could happen in their own nations just due to the economic instability that was around at the time. And what ends up happening is when we look for this human champion to be the person that we're going to get behind to go towards this, instead of evaluating the political spectrum as something that is going to have problems on either side and needs to be critiqued distinctly from a Christian angle, no matter what the political ideology is going to be, it gets us to put all of our eggs in one basket and then conflate that political mission with the mission of the Kingdom of God.

Don Payne Okay. The subtitle of your book, which is The Demonic Origin of Nationalism, reflects a pretty key theme in your book, which is power.

David Ritchie Yes.

Don Payne And you develop this I thought in a very interesting way, particularly how power and what scripture and you call the powers, how those function in ideologies like nationalism. I was

really captured by that because, you know, it's not uncommon in some Christian circles to talk about spiritual warfare, spiritual powers. You're a reformed guy. And I don't hear reformed guys talk about that all that much. Now, that may be my own narrowness and limitations, but I don't hear many in the Reformed tribe talk about the spiritual powers the way you have. But let me quote a little bit from your book and have you comment on these, if you would. You say while the condition of spiritual death and darkness via the dominion of the powers is universal to all who are outside Christ, Paul also sees the powers playing a role in cultivating communal identities among people of various cultures. The powers captivate people groups within bounds of their nationality and ethnicity through the means of what Paul calls the *Stoikea*. A term that Paul uses only in conjunction with the powers. And you go on and develop that in a number of ways. But yeah, I'm just curious to have you outline that a little bit, how you see nationalism in the ways you've described it, functioning as the instrument of spiritual powers.

David Ritchie Yes, sir. So I do choose the Apostle Paul's doctrine of powers, or principalities and powers might be more common to people, that comes from the King James version of that translation. Typically, we see in the more modern translations of the terms, rulers and authorities. And essentially, I'm asking the question, what do these terms mean? What's the intellectual history behind them? And how might they form a conceptual framework or a bridge for how we might understand at least some aspect of that very spiritual agency, an aspect that seems to be such an animating force in something like nationalism. And essentially, I do think you're correct, Dr. Payne, in the sense that for a lot of Protestant theology post-Enlightenment, demonology is somewhat of a neglected subject. I've heard it said by one author, you know, after the Enlightenment, we had barely enough room for the doctrine of God, let alone angels and demons. And so I think that there's actually this huge category in the Bible that actually helps us understand the nature of reality. And from a biblical standpoint, we believe the word of God is true. We believe it's authoritative. If we're missing some avenue of understanding the nature of reality, we really are not seeing the full picture. And so as I began to study, particularly what the powers were up to, maybe in a book like a Ephesians or Colossians, one of the things that you see them consistently doing is they're trying to convince the Jew and the Gentile that they are not unified in Christ, to in some ways convince them that their cultural identity or their nationality deserves a higher level of allegiance and authority in their life than really their place in Christ Jesus and together within the body of Christ. And as I began to go down that whole, I caught this thread of scholarship that goes deep into the Old Testament showing how the powers have been absolutely active in the nations of the world. In fact, God essentially chooses Israel to be His holy people and saves the family of Abraham out from the nation, calls them to be his vessel, his vehicle through which his plan of redemption will be launched into the world. However, the other nations do seem to be under this spiritual authority and an oppression that causes them at times to be spiritually blind to the things of God.

Don Payne Yeah, they're not just acting on their own.

David Ritchie Yeah. I mean, they're an active source of injustice, in perpetuating injustice, among the nations of the world. And so where you see that really active is particularly in the fact that much of these, especially ancient Near East nations, have national patron deities that they worship. And so, I mean, if you're going to be a good Moabite, you better be worshiping Chemosh. And if you're a good ammonite and part of that identity as a part of your nationality means that you're someone that worships a God like Moloch. And so it becomes this really profound thing that happens when Jesus dies and he rises again, that the powers and the authority that they once held over the nations are delegitimized. They are no more. And it shows us this fascinating

connection between the idols and the spiritual reality that surrounds us. And so, in one sense, the idols are dead. They're nothing but gold and silver. They're made with human hands, but they are connected to spiritual reality. That's why Paul says that whenever we're, you know, essentially worshipping idols, we're having fellowship with demons. And so there is this spiritual agency that's behind this. And essentially what I see in this is there's not that much of a distinction between an ancient member of an ancient near East society worshipping their national patron deity that is supposed to be the spiritual embodiment of their given nation and a modern nationalist that is basically worshipping their vision of a nation as their ultimate and their highest good with a sense of fervor and devotion and sacrifice.

Don Payne You know, I appreciate the way you said that, David, because when you said worshipping their vision of a nation, that was a pretty important distinction between worshipping a person, because I think most American Christians would really stop short of saying, oh, yes, I worship a person. But to worship, I think the way you said it, to worship their vision of a nation is what ends up taking people to the same kind of place. Is that accurate?

David Ritchie I think that is accurate. It's essentially all the trappings of worship. And so it is an interesting thing. For example, all the level of sacred accord that nations typically place in the treatment of their flags, how their flags are to be acknowledged, how their flags are to be appropriately appreciated in some sense almost, it's the same way that highly liturgical traditions would almost approach something like the Eucharist. It has to be done the right way. It's imbued with a sense of a sacred reality that I think is very significant. And I think that there's a power in these liturgical actions. They are meant to stir our affections in a particular way. And I think that, again, the whole point is not that devotion to one's nation is a bad thing or appreciation of our nation is a bad thing, or to even promote a positive view of citizenship or national solidarity is a bad thing. It's when that love becomes disordered, that something very nefarious happens and it can lead people to do just absolutely horrific things in a way that they think they're doing the right thing. And so it's simply a desire, what I want to put in place is at least one argument that shows that this is an idol that has been throughout human history, and it's one that's led many people astray and it's led a lot of people to do horrific things. And at times, this idol can even be presented in the veneer of the name of Jesus. And when that happens, we do need to be discerning and we need to be careful knowing that when we get near an idol like this, that it's greedy for our affection. It wants us to give it more devotion and allegiance than it's rightly merited. And we have to be sensitive to those things as Christians and discerning just in the sense that our highest worship, our highest devotion and allegiance belongs to Christ and his kingdom alone. And it just so happens to be that's the one kingdom that cannot be shaken, because these kingdoms of man, they can be shaken, and they have been shaking for quite some time. The world around us is filled with chaos. And it's in that place that I want to challenge people to have, you know, the eyes of Isaiah, the prophet, who when the nation is shaking, when things are going the way, we don't want them to go, that we can have a vision of the Lord high and lifted up and seeing that His glory really is the source of our most ultimate hope.

Don Payne Yeah, I really, really appreciate that. I want to loop back just for a second, because I hope nobody kind of got stuck on what you said about flag protocols and didn't hear the rest of what you said, because would you say, or do you think that having protocols like that is inherently wrong or is it dangerous? I mean, do we do we teach our children not to say the Pledge of Allegiance or engage flag protocols? How would you help people practically navigate some of that?

David Ritchie Yeah, there might be differing convictions on this particular thing. I don't think it's inappropriate to be able to have a value of our flag as a symbol. Right. I think that we can do things on that, that border some level of idolatry and worship at times. Right. I will say, having done this study, one thing that has probably changed in my mind, in my heart is that I do believe that it's an odd thing that we do say a pledge of allegiance to the American flag. Because I do view that word allegiance as something that has a lot of power to it. And so I know obviously, we can't probably do a pledge of appreciation to the flag or appreciation to the country.

Don Payne Yeah that's got no kick to it, does it?

David Ritchie It doesn't have the same kick to it. But I will say that after having written this book and done all of the study that goes into it, I think it is something that is significant that we actually say the word allegiance. And I would, at least in my own heart, want to clearly define exactly what that term means.

Don Payne Yeah. And I think one of the points, one of the takeaways from what you're saying, David, is that we ought at the very least, to think about those words that we use and maybe assume and throw around quite glibly. We ought to think about them because, you know, words mean things. Words matter. Words do things even if we're not aware that they're doing them. You use the Apostle Paul's experience in Ephesus as a bit of a case study for how spiritual power gets embedded in particular cultures and in the practices of those cultures. How do you think that speaks to what we see today in our own country, if there's anything additional beyond what you've already said?

David Ritchie Yes. The experience that Paul has in Ephesus, I think, is the case study of ministry in view of the rulers and the authorities, the powers, the spiritual kind of beings, and some sense that the gospel is contending with. And essentially, Artemis of Ephesus is the main patron deity of the city of Ephesus. One of the seven great wonders of the world, her temple, is there and there's a thriving tourist industry coming to visit and a thriving industry of idol makers that are furnishing, you know, souvenirs and idols selling that to people. And essentially the years that Paul spends in Ephesus are so profoundly fruitful that it begins to actually cause this one sector of the economy to crash.

Don Payne If I can interject just there, that's an interesting indicator of the effectiveness of gospel ministry, isn't it? When it starts to mess with the local economy, you know something's going on.

David Ritchie And so it gets people's attention. And Demetrius, the silversmith, who is very much upset about this, organizes basically his silversmith guild and a lot of the people in Ephesus, and they essentially throw this rally or this riot. And at this rally they're shouting, you know, great is Artemis of Ephesus or great as Artemis of the Ephesians. And I find that so fascinating that Demetrius' solution is not what better economic policy could we have or is there a better way of, you know, adding diversity to our city's economy? It really is a religious solution. And the whole idea that you can see in the Greco-Roman world is to be disloyal to a city's patron deity, was to be a bad citizen. It was to be automatically under suspicion that you don't really belong here. You're not really one of us. And in fact, you might invite the wrath of God upon us if you keep on thinking the way that you do and you keep on not essentially offering tribute to the God that is over the city, but the gospel destroys all of that. You know, the gospel basically is bringing in people not just from a Jewish ethnic background, but from a gentile ethnic background. And they're coming together. The Jew and the Gentile are becoming one. And in the words of Ephesians 3, that is the

display of the manifold wisdom of God specifically to the powers. It is essentially Jesus showing his power, his might, and his ultimate spiritual authority. And so I do think that it should be an active question that we should ask as pastors, as missionaries, as those that are trying to maybe look at our ministry context with a sense of this missiological lens of what are the active rulers and authorities of this place in a spiritual sense? What are the idols that people are drawn to worship in such a way that it is being worshiped in a way that only Christ should be worshiped? I think that gives us a level of insight in terms of some of the spiritual realities that are at play. And it's cool what Paul does. I mean, he's not doing a lot of the things that you would typically associate with spiritual warfare. He's not doing a prayer walk. He's not, you know, going and doing anything other than simply declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ and allowing the Church of Ephesus to embody a way of life that is not possible outside of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I mean, it really is the normal means of grace and the bold declaration of the Gospel that is able to have this culture changing effect on the city. And I think it's just something that we should have in our hearts and our minds is that, you know, these high places, these temples, these, you know, powers and principalities, they're around us. But Jesus' victory is so grand, it's so glorious that the gospel we proclaim is a light that shines in that darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

Don Payne Well, yeah, again, I just appreciate the way you've you said and underscored all of that, David. And, you know, it may be one of the biggest challenges for many American Christians to absorb, just to realize that behind, well, let me back up because of the kind of the dualistic worldview that is so common in post-Enlightenment, Western cultures, where the whole spiritual realm is either denied altogether or considered mythical or just kind of relegated at best. One big learning, one big takeaway in all of this is simply to be able to acknowledge that there are spiritual powers of darkness behind things that look very ordinary, very benign, and that we assume to be often very good. And yet these things can be working at odds with the gospel. I'm curious what type of, I'm going to shift focus here just for a second as we start to wind down, what type of reactions and feedback have you received from your work since it was released? I can only imagine it's stirred a lot.

David Ritchie It has. And honestly, for a project or a book that was based off of a master's thesis, it's gotten a lot more attention and probably a lot more readership than I would have expected. And that has everything to do with simply the timeliness of the topic. I think that nationalism and Christian nationalism are things that people hear those terms thrown around. It seems like every other week they're trending on Twitter or social media. And so I think there's a lot of interest in trying to be able to understand what this thing is. A lot of conversation right now on just trying to define terms and understand them rightly. And I think that there is an interest in, you know, a pastor from West Texas trying to be able to understand this from a distinctly Christian, theological, and biblical standpoint. With that said, I have been really pleasantly surprised locally from the people who have actually read the book. I've received really, really positive feedback. I've also received some really angry, you know, random messages, email or Facebook. But it's usually never from someone who's actually taken the time to read what I'm saying. Because of our highly polarized partisan era that we live in right now, there's a lot more of an assumption about what I might be saying, as opposed to what I'm actually saying, because I mean the title of the book is incendiary, *The Demonic Origin of Nationalism*. The central cover image is of the noose or the gallows that were erected on the Capitol grounds the day of January 6th. And those are powerful images. But what I'm making is a rather sincere argument, and that, I hope is actually persuasive to the very people that I most want to persuade. And, yes, that particular event on January 6th was associated with one side of the political spectrum. But I want to be very clear in saying that nationalism as a phenomenon is not something that is inherently associated only with the right

side of the political spectrum. In fact, many people would correctly say that Joseph Stalin was a nationalist, that he met the definition of what that was. And so it's not as much about an ideology or one particular side of the political spectrum. It is all about when this becomes ultimate in our eyes. And usually when people are able to get over that hump, they're able to receive that well. And so it seems like right now with the January 6th hearing happening right now, that there's been a whole new wave of readership that has begun to be interested in this work. And I've been really pleasantly surprised to be able to find readers that are either in academia or in ministry that have interacted with it in a positive way. And so I look forward to more conversations and more opportunities to be able to talk about this really important idea, but to talk about it in explicitly biblical and theological categories.

Don Payne I'm really glad of that, David. What kind of impact has it had on your own congregation?

David Ritchie For the most part, people have been remarkably supportive of it. It's something that as a pastor, this is not something that I have promoted in my own church. It's been something that was, you know, completely separate. So we're not doing like a Why do the Nations Rage sermon series through anything at Redeemed Christian Church right now. I mean, we're just marching through Romans. And so people have read it, and I've had members of the congregation read it. And it is academic. I mean, it's a little bit more of a kind of a thicker read, even though it's a shorter read. But again, I've received really, really positive comments from the people that have read it. I've had a few people that expressed concerns when they first saw the cover art. Which of course, you know, for people that have gone through the publishing process you know, that's not necessarily something you control. That's something that the publisher ultimately decides. But I did feel like it was appropriate because the very first image of the book is essentially why is it now that we're seeing Christians in America so associated with this phenomenon of nationalism? And why was it that some of the people that were bringing Jesus flags on that day also shouting in unison, you know, to hang the vice president of the United States? I wanted to confront that very uncomfortable topic, because it is something that I think is worthy of our attention. And so I'm not going to pretend that there aren't people that were very disturbed that I wrote about this or had concerns. But by the grace of God, I think I've been able to earn a lot of trust, not just in my own congregation, but in the broader community. And because of that, people have given it, for the most part, a chance to actually read and engage the idea, rather than just their preconceived notion of what I'm trying to communicate.

Don Payne Yeah, well, you're right, there is a lot of work being done right now in different media outlets trying to get some handles on this phenomenon of nationalism and Christian nationalism. And I think those are healthy and helpful conversations. And I've got to say, David, you've made a really thoughtful contribution to that overall conversation. And I would really encourage listeners to engage your work and think about it and to study it because you've done your homework. And this is a good and thoughtful contribution to what is a very turbulent and a very complex topic. But I think you are serving the church well by helping us think about it in more than merely sociological and political terms. But to think about it in light of the gospel, to look at it through the lens of the gospel. And of course, that's what we want to be all about here at Denver Seminary. And so I really appreciate and value what you've done to set an example for us, to think gospel-ly, think in terms of the gospel about what we're seeing go on in our nation today. Thanks for the time on the conversation. Really. Always good to visit with you and just appreciate so deeply your ministry there in Amarillo and particularly what you've offered to us in this work. Friends again the work is entitled Why Do the Nations Rage? The Demonic Origin of Nationalism by David Ritchie.

You can find it online at your favorite book outlet, and I would encourage you to get a copy and take a good, careful read of it. This is, as always Denver Seminary's Engage360. We're really honored that you would spend a few moments with us every time we release a new episode. We love to hear from you. You can email us at podcast@DenverSeminary.edu. And if you are thinking about seminary education at any level, whether it's a degree or a certificate or, you know somebody who would love to engage some higher education in theological studies, we'd love to have you visit our website. It's DenverSeminary.edu. And friends, we look forward to speaking with you again very soon. Take care.