

A HOLY AMBITION:

TO PREACH WHERE CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN NAMED

**A COLLECTION OF SERMONS BY
JOHN PIPER**

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A HOLY AMBITION

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JOHN PIPER

A Holy Ambition: To Preach Where Christ Has Not Been Named

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Published by Desiring God

Post Office Box 2901

Minneapolis, MN 55402

www.desiringGod.org

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ISBN: 978-0-9827689-9-0

Cover design: Stuart Hanberg

Cover photo: NASA Visible Earth

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

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PREFACE

BILL WALSH

As I travel throughout the United States and abroad, I am amazed at how often I run into people doing cross-cultural ministry who tell me that John Piper's book *Let the Nations Be Glad!* was a key influence in their calling. I have conversed with such people on four continents now. So it seems that many have been challenged and launched into missions by the prophetic call that God has placed on Pastor John's ministry.

In my own case, I did not come from a background that placed much emphasis on missions. To be honest, it was hardly on my radar. After joining Bethlehem Baptist Church in 1999, however, it wasn't long before I was exposed to this grand theme of Scripture. I distinctly remember where I was sitting in the downtown sanctuary when it first began to land on me. In the middle of John's sermon "Let All the Peoples Praise Him,"¹ I sensed the Lord moving me towards becoming an engaged "sender." Immediately after the service, I leaned over to my wife and shared a plan of action that was on my heart. Little did I realize that this moment would be the seed that many years later would grow into a shift in my vocational calling, giving rise to what I am engaged in today.

God ordains the means by which his will is made known. He is the God of both *means* and *ends*. He sends both *messenger* and *message* to call his people in mission. He calls the *witness* and provides the *words of good news*. He ordains the *prophet* and the *prophecy*. Both are vital, although they don't always appear together. The apostle Paul personally visited the cities of Asia Minor to teach and make disciples. He also sent divinely inspired letters, which had formative impact on the early church and still instruct us today, thousands of years later.

As the archetype, God sent us a Person *and* a Book (which testifies to that Person) in order to gather to himself a people for the fame of his name. Today he sends goers to every part of the world *and* he deploys technology

¹<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/let-all-the-peoples-praise-him>

of all kinds to reach even the hardest places. He calls us to engage in the global cause both as field workers *and* as content dispatchers.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him
who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings
good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says
to Zion, “Your God reigns.”²

In the last century the demographic center of global Christianity has shifted south in a big way. Huge numbers of people are being added to the church daily in Africa, Asia, and South America.³ But the supply of biblically trained shepherds to lead these churches is in no way keeping pace. In Europe, on the other hand, the church is in decline, struggling just to stay in existence in some places. In many of these world regions there is a theological dearth, a famine of sound resources, making the church susceptible to false teachings of all kinds.

This tremendous need is hard for those of us in the West to imagine. We have unending access to good teaching in many formats: printed books, e-books, magazines, websites, radio channels, MP3s, and online streaming video. Our problem is not one of famine but of malnourishment. The North American church is often weak from ignorantly choosing spiritual junk food, while huge stores of life-giving sustenance are at our fingertips.

Historically God has used the written word as a vital means of building his church, whether it's the printed Scriptures in the language of the people, the writings of the early church fathers, or the pamphlets of the Reformation. As Richard Cole notes,

The Reformation itself seems to be almost unthinkable
without taking into consideration the printed pages of
Luther's sermons, essays, addresses, and biblical transla-
tions. Indeed, the Reformation went hand in hand with

²Isaiah 52:7; cf. Romans 10:15.

³Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (revised and updated edition; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009).

book and press. There is in all the centuries preceding the sixteenth century nothing comparable to the print media explosion of the 1520s, an upsurge of activity that coincided exactly with the Reformation in Germany.⁴

By God's design, doing missions with content, in all its modern formats, continues to be one of the most effective means for advancing the gospel. It is key to equipping the next generation of leaders. According to Ralph Winter, this is one of the most strategic ways to minister:

There are two things in the entire history of missions that have been absolutely central. One, obviously, is the Bible itself. The other is the printed page. There is absolutely nothing else, in terms of mission methodology, that outranks the importance of the printed page. Meetings come and go and personalities appear and are gone. But, the printed page continues to speak.⁵

Since 1994, the mission of Desiring God has been to create and distribute resources that spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.⁶ In the spirit of "all peoples," we are working to get resources into globally accessible formats and languages in support of the cause of missions. We hope to remove barriers that hinder the free flow of solid biblical teaching, especially to world regions that need it most.

For this anthology, we have selected and arranged key sermons and articles from more than 30 years of John Piper's preaching on missions. It is our hope that this material will prove a helpful supplement to *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, written almost 20 years ago. The format of the sermons was more or less kept intact with only minimal edits. We thought it might prove a useful model for preachers to see how Pastor John goes about preaching

⁴Reformation Printers: Unsung Heroes, Richard G. Cole, Published by: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Autumn, 1984), pp. 327-339, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2540767>

⁵Ralph Winter, quote for Bible Pathway Ministries.
<http://www.biblepathway.org/English/FriendsOfBP.html>

⁶<http://www.desiringGod.org>

missions and the way Missions Focus week is handled at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Another reason is that *Let the Nations Be Glad!* already provides a sustained voice in the form of an academic monograph. We wanted this anthology to be, in part, on the *preaching* of missions.

Our prayer here at Desiring God is that God would be pleased to use this new anthology to strengthen his global church. And that the disbursement of gospel-centered resources in various formats and through various media might mobilize senders, goers, and resources so that the good news that “Our God reigns” will gather and strengthen God’s people in every corner of the world.

Bill Walsh

Director of International Outreach

Desiring God

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

**A HOLY AMBITION:
TO PREACH WHERE CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN NAMED
ROMANS 15:18–24
JOHN PIPER
AUGUST 27, 2006**

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Romans 15:18–24

There are three things in this text that I think we should focus on. All of them have direct implications for your life (even if you are currently not aware of them), and all of them relate directly to God and his purposes in the twenty-first century. I see, first, a holy ambition; second, an immeasurable need; third, a global strategy. So let’s take these one at a time and see how they relate to each other and to us and our world today.

1. A HOLY AMBITION

Verse 20: “And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation.”

Paul was controlled by a holy ambition. I say he was *controlled* because he says in verse 22, “This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.” And he says at the end of verse 23, “I have longed for many years to come to you.”

When you long to do something for years and years, but you don’t do it, something or someone must be controlling you to the contrary. And what was controlling Paul and keeping him from going to Rome is that he was not finished with his ambition in the regions from Jerusalem to Illyricum. But finally, he says in verse 23, “I no longer have any room for work in these regions.” And then in verse 24: “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.”

In other words, he was controlled by an ambition to preach the gospel to those who had not heard the name of Jesus from Jerusalem to Illyricum (modern-day Albania), and he would not turn from this ambition until it was fulfilled. But now the work is done in those regions, and his ambition is taking him to Spain. That frees him finally to do what he has wanted to do for years—namely, visit the church in Rome and enjoy their company for a little while.

It is a good thing to be controlled by a holy ambition. Are you controlled by a holy ambition? I am calling it “holy” because its aim is holy—to see people from all the nations who have never heard of Jesus believe in him and become obedient to him and be saved by him from their sin and from God’s wrath. I am also calling this ambition “holy” because it comes from the holy God and his holy word, as we will see in a few moments. It is right and it is good to be controlled by a holy ambition.

Do you have a holy ambition? Not everyone should have Paul’s ambition. One plants, another waters (1 Corinthians 3:6-8). Each has his own gift (1 Corinthians 7:7). Each stands or falls his their own master (Romans 14:4). But I think God would be pleased if each of his children had a holy ambition.

HOLY AMBITION FOR GIRLS AND BOYS

Little children, listen to me carefully for a moment. I know the words, “holy ambition,” are unusual and you don’t use them every day. “Holy ambition” means something you *really* want to do that God wants you to do. Something you want to do so much that doing it keeps you from doing other things that you also really like to do. Paul really wanted to go to Rome for years. But he didn’t go because he wanted something else more. He wanted to preach the gospel in Asia and Greece where people didn’t know about Jesus. He really, really, really wanted to do this. We call that kind of desire an “ambition.” And we call it “holy ambition” when it is something God wants you to do.

Do you have one? Probably not yet. You’re still a child. That’s what you’re supposed to be. But some day you won’t be a child any more. And one of the differences between being a child and growing up is that growing up as a Christian means you get a holy ambition. Most little girls, my Talitha included, really want to have and play with dolls. That’s a good thing. But the day is going to come, little girls, when you will put away the fun of playing with dolls and grow up into the even bigger, better joy of caring for real babies in the nursery. And maybe you will even lead a ministry someday of caring for hungry babies far away, or lonely babies who have no mommy or daddy. And for some of you this will become a holy ambition. For others your holy ambition will be something else.

And boys, listen. If you are like I was, what you really want is a ball, a truck, and gun and somebody to play with. I’ve never had a real gun (except a pellet rifle). But I shot a lot of bad guys with my Matt Dillon pistol and my Lukas McCain-like, circle-handled rifle. I loved playing football with my friends and digging roads across the street for my trucks and drawing my pistol so fast you couldn’t see it. It was fun. And that was good.

But some day you won’t be a little boy any more. And one of the differences between being a little boy and growing up is that growing up as a Christian means you get a holy ambition. And that means the fun of guns and trucks and balls gets small and the joy of fighting for justice and salvation gets big. Growing up means getting a holy ambition to wield the sword of the Spirit mightily and drive a truckload of love to the needy and kick Satan’s rear end in the name of Jesus.

Mom and Dad, single people, young and old, Christians should have a holy ambition. Something you really, really want to do for the glory of God. It is something that controls you. It helps you decide not to go to “Rome” yet. It gives eternal focus, organization and passion to your life.

THE SOURCE OF HOLY AMBITION

Where does it come from? A crucial part of the answer is given in the link between verses 20 and 21. “Thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, [then Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15] ‘Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.’”

Now here is the amazing and relevant thing about this for us. We know from Acts 9 and 22 and 26 that Paul was called by the risen Christ on the Damascus road. Jesus gave Paul his mission in Acts 26:18, “I am sending you [to the Gentiles, the nations] to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” So he got a calling straight from the risen, living, all-sovereign Jesus Christ to be a light to the Gentiles.

But that’s not what he says in Romans 15:21. He doesn’t say, “I have this ambition to be a light to the nations who don’t know Christ because Jesus called me on the Damascus road.” He says, “I have this ambition—I am controlled by a passion to preach where Christ has not been named—because Isaiah 52:15 says, ‘Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.’”

What do you make of that? Here’s what I make of it. When Jesus called Paul on the Damascus road to take the gospel to the Gentiles who had never heard, Paul went to his Bible (what we today call the “Old Testament”) and looked for a confirmation and explanation of this calling to see how it fit into God’s overall plan. And he found it. And for our sake he speaks this way. He doesn’t just refer to his experience on the Damascus road, which we will never have. He refers to God’s written word that we *do* have. And he roots his ambition there.

So my answer to the question, *Where does your holy ambition come from?*

is this: It comes from a personal encounter with the living Christ (not necessarily as dramatic as the Damascus road), shaped and informed and empowered by the written word of God. As you meditate on the law of the Lord day and night (cf. Psalm 1:2)—as you immerse yourself in God’s word—he comes and takes some truth of that word and burns it into your heart until it becomes a holy ambition. If that hasn’t happened yet, saturate yourself with the word of God and ask him for it.

2. AN IMMEASURABLE NEED

God doesn’t lead us into ambitions that are pointless—that you will regret at the end of your life. There is always a need to be met—not a need in God, but in the world—by a holy ambition. Holy ambitions are not about self-exaltation. They are always a form of love. They always meet someone’s need(s).

Now what is the immeasurable need Paul refers to in this text? Verse 20: “Thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named.” That means that Paul has set his face like flint to preach the gospel to people who have never heard of Christ. They don’t even know his name.

THE NATIONS HAVE NO EXCUSE

Now here’s the question: If these people don’t even know Jesus’ name, then are they responsible to believe on him for salvation? And if not, then wouldn’t it be safer for them just to leave them in their ignorance and believe that God will have mercy on them and they will be saved because they haven’t heard of Jesus? Why, Paul, do you suffer so much to preach the gospel to people who have never heard the name of Jesus?

Paul gave the answer in Romans 1:18–23. Read it with me slowly and soberly and feel the weight of it the way Paul must have. These words are written about all those peoples and nations that have never heard the name of Jesus and that Paul’s holy ambition is driving to reach.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known

about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [Those are the fatal words that define the immeasurable need Paul sees; the nations that have never heard of Jesus will have no excuse at the judgment day.] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Paul says in Romans 2:12, “All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.” Everybody will be judged according to that which they have access. And everybody will perish who does not hear the gospel, because everybody suppresses the truth that they have and lives in rebellion against God. There is only one hope: hearing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The need of the nations who do not know the name of Jesus is an immeasurable need. It is an infinite need. The greatest need that can be imagined is the need of the nations to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and believe. Because the gospel of Jesus “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). And no one is saved without it.

Not every one of you is called to go like Paul. But you can't be a loving person and not want your life to count or contribute to the meeting of this great need.

3. A GLOBAL STRATEGY

But some of you God is calling to join Paul personally and vocationally in this particular global strategy. Here's the strategy. And it is amazing. If you are newer to Bethlehem, listen carefully for how we understand missions.

Here are Paul's amazing statements.

First, verse 19b: "From Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ." That's from Jerusalem up through Syria, across Asia Minor (Turkey), down through Greece on the east side and up the west to northern Italy where Albania is today. Paul says he has fulfilled the gospel there. And he underlines that astonishing statement in verse 23 by saying, "I no longer have any room for work in these regions." And then in verse 24 he says, "I go to Spain."

What in the world did he mean that he had no room for work from Jerusalem to Illyricum? It is not a risk to say that there were tens of thousands of people yet to be evangelized in those regions. We know this because Paul writes to Timothy at Ephesus (in this very region) and commands him to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5). In other words, there are people that need to be evangelized. And Paul says his work is done in this region.

We take that to mean: Paul is not a local evangelist; he's a frontier missionary, a pioneer missionary. That is, his calling and his ambition is not to do evangelism where the church has been planted. The church should do that. Paul's calling and his ambition is to preach the gospel where there is no evangelizing church. There are no Christians. They don't even know the name.

MISSIONS, EVANGELISM, AND HOLY AMBITION

The terminology is not what's crucial. What's crucial is the distinction. There are frontier or pioneer missionaries, and there are evangelists. Missionaries cross cultures and learn languages. And *frontier* missionaries pour out their lives "by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:18-19) to break through thousands of years of darkness and the reign of Satan over a people who do not know the King of kings and the Savior of the world.

This was Paul's ambition. And since the great commission to make disciples of all nations is still valid and there are peoples today who do not know the gospel, therefore every church should pray that God raise up many frontier missionaries, and make all of us evangelists.

I can imagine—indeed I pray—that ten years from now someone—

perhaps ten of you—will write a letter home from an unreached people and say, “I am here to speak the gospel to those who have never heard, for as it is written in Romans 15:20, ‘I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation.’ God burned that word onto my heart and turned it into a holy ambition at Bethlehem Baptist Church, August, 2006.”

Lord, please, do that. Amen.

CHAPTER TWO

MISSIONS: THE WORSHIP OF JESUS AND THE JOY OF ALL PEOPLES⁷

DAVID MATHIS

Missions is about the worship of Jesus. The goal of missions is the global worship of Jesus by his redeemed people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The outcome of missions is all peoples delighting to praise Jesus. And the motivation for missions is the enjoyment that his people have in him. Missions aims at, brings about, and is fueled by the worship of Jesus.

Another way to say it is that missions is about Jesus' global glory. From beginning to end—in target, effect, and impetus—missions centers on the worldwide fame of Jesus in the praises of his diverse peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation. What's at stake in missions is the universal honor of the Father in the global glory of his Son in the joy of all the peoples.

WHAT IS MISSIONS?

Rooted in the Latin *mitto* (meaning “to send”), *missions* is the half-millennium-old term signifying the *sending* of Jesus' followers into his global harvest of all peoples. For nearly 300 years, the term *missions* has been used in particular for world evangelization, for pioneering the gospel among the peoples to whom it has yet to advance.

Two passages in the Gospel of Matthew get to the heart of missions. Jesus says to his disciples in Matthew 9:37–38, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to *send out* laborers into his harvest.” Missions means *sending out* workers into the global harvest.

A second passage is Jesus' sending out of his disciples in Matthew 28:18–20, the epic-making summons called the “Great Commission.” Here

⁷This chapter written by John Piper's executive assistant David Mathis appeared originally in *Don't Call It a Comeback: The Old Faith for a New Day*, edited by Kevin DeYoung (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

Jesus' main command "disciple all nations" follows the charge to "go"—to be *sent out*. Sending out and going are two sides of the same coin. Jesus and his established church send out, and those who go are "the sent ones," or "missionaries." So *missions* is the church's sending out of missionaries (the sent ones) to pioneer the church among peoples who otherwise have no access to the gospel.

JESUS' COMMISSION

Perhaps the best way forward in this chapter is to walk through this Great Commission that gets at the heart of the missionary enterprise.

And Jesus came and said to [his disciples], "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

JESUS HAS ALL AUTHORITY (VERSE 18)

First, Jesus says that "all authority" in heaven and on earth has been given to him. From all eternity, the divine Son had "all authority" as God, but now, by virtue of his taking on our humanity and accomplishing our redemption, the Son comes into "all authority" as human, as the God-man. He has fulfilled the destiny of humanity (Ps. 8:3–8; Heb. 2:5–10) and rules the globe with the very sovereignty of God, ensuring the success of his global mission.

He will not be thwarted in carrying out his promise, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). The God-man most certainly will make good on his pledge that his gospel "will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). He guarantees the fulfillment of Habakkuk 2:14, that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

MEGALOMANIA...OR LOVE?

Is it megalomania for Jesus to use "all authority" to make himself the most

famous person in the universe? If knowing Jesus were anything less than the greatest of enjoyments, then his pursuit would be unloving. But he *is* the most valuable Reality in the universe. Knowing him is “the surpassing worth” that makes it gain to count all else loss (Phil. 3:8). Therefore, it is profoundly loving for Jesus to exalt himself. He cannot love the nations without putting himself on display because it is only him that truly satisfies the human soul. This makes God’s heart for God the deepest foundation for missions.

So the bedrock of the Great Commission is most ultimately not God’s heart for the nations—amazing as that is—but God’s heart for God. And God’s pursuit of his glory makes the cause of missions unstoppable. As surely as he will not give his glory to another (Isa. 48:11), so the Commission will not fail. His honor is at stake. When we pursue the glory of God in the worship of Jesus in the global cause of missions, we get on board with a mission that will not abort. Jesus will build his church. The task of missions will finish.

“DISCIPLE ALL NATIONS” (VERSE 19)

In view of his unmatched authority, Jesus draws out an implication for his followers—one of the most important *therefores* in the history of the world. “Go *therefore* and make disciples of all nations...”

The two commands “go” and “disciple all nations” in English work together as one charge in Matthew’s original Greek. A literal translation would be “having gone, disciple all nations.” The main emphasis falls on discipling, but the going is the necessary path. In order to engage in this worldwide task of discipling all nations, there must be a going. Jesus does not promise that all nations will come to Jerusalem and so his disciples can continue to invest where they are. They will need to go. Oceans and borders must be crossed. Like Paul and Barnabas in Antioch, they will need to be “sent out” (Acts 13:3). There must be missionaries.

But even in our current global context, where unreached peoples are clustering in cities where churches already are established, another kind of going must happen: learning a language and new culture and being “sent out” from ordinary, everyday life among people just like us. Even where geography isn’t an issue, culture and language are. The Commission

necessitates goings of all sorts.

DISCIPLE IS A VERB

So if Jesus' charge to "disciple all nations" is the heart of the Commission, what does he mean by this discipling? He does not mean the mere pursuit of conversion. That won't work with what follows: "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Teaching the nations "to observe all that I have commanded you" is not the mere pursuit of conversion. And if discipling all nations doesn't mean simply classroom information-transfer, but "teaching to observe," what must it entail?

At least it must entail spiritual maturity. And so this is how many well-meaning Christians today use the term *discipleship*—as a term for pursuing spiritual maturity. Being a "disciple," they say, means being a serious, rather than casual, follower of Jesus. "Discipleship programs" are designed for those intentionally seeking Christian growth, so it goes. Maybe. But something seems to be lacking here.

JESUS' EXAMPLE

Within the context of Matthew's Gospel, is there not more to say? Does "disciple all nations" not call to mind how Jesus himself "discipled" his men? They were, after all, his "disciples." And when they heard him say, "disciple all nations," would they not think this discipleship is what he did with them—investing prolonged, real-life, day-in, day-out, intentional time with younger believers in order to bring them to maturity as well as model for them how to *disciple* others in the same way?

This sounds like what Paul is getting at in 2 Timothy 2:2, when he instructs his disciple Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." *Timothy, my disciple, disciple others to disciple others.* Four spiritual generations get explicit mention here: Paul, Timothy, "faithful men," and "others also"—with the implication that further generations are to follow.

Discipleship, seen in this light, entails not merely the pursuit of spiritual maturity but the need for personal connection and substantial intentional investment of time, the kind of investment for which there must be *going to*

accomplish. Jesus spent three years with his twelve disciples. He called them to be discipled at the outset of his ministry (Matt. 4:19), and he gave them the lion's share of his life until his departure in Matthew 28. He invested his life in these men. It is amazing to track in the Gospels how much Jesus gave of himself to his disciples. The crowds pursued him, but he pursued his disciples. He was willing to bless the masses, but he invested in the few.

ALL NATIONS

But if “disciple” refers not merely to conversion but spiritual maturity, and even the personal investment of the discipler's life, what about “all nations”? Here Jesus has struck a note that is part of a biblical symphony spanning the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

From creation, God has been concerned with “all the nations.” The genealogies of Genesis trace the origin of all nations to Adam through Noah and his sons (Gen. 10).⁸ And with his blessing of all nations in mind, God called a moon-worshiper named Abram to “Go from your country...to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1–3). Note the word “all.”

From Abram (renamed Abraham, “the father of a multitude of nations,” in Gen. 17:4–5) would come God's chosen nation, Israel. This nation's special relationship with God was to bring about blessing to the rest of the world's nations who were separated from their creator going back to their father Adam.

For the sake of the nations, God worked in and through this one nation for two thousand years. He multiplied her number, delivered her from slavery, led her through the wilderness, defeated her enemies, established her in his Promised Land, and brought her to her highest point of peace and prosperity under the kingship of David and his son Solomon. With the temple completed under Solomon, it looked as if God's blessing now was poised to come to the nations through Israel's flourishing and the nations' submission to her.

⁸Acts 17:26 confirms that God “made from one man every nation of mankind.”

COME-AND-SEE

In 1 Kings 4, Israel has become “as many as the sand by the sea” (verse 20). Solomon is ruling “over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt” (verse 21) and said to have “dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates” (verse 24). Is this the fulfillment God’s promises to Abram in Genesis 12:3 and 15:5 to make his descendants as numerous as the stars and to bless the nations through his offspring? Has God brought all his purposes to pass in Israel’s prosperity so that now climactically “all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God” (1 Kings 8:60)?

But the sin problem that began with Adam still remained, with Israel herself suffering from the same sinful condition as all the nations. Just as the nations needed the blessing of forgiveness, a new heart, removal of divine wrath, and restoration to God himself, so also did Israel. And 1 Kings 11—2 Kings 25 catalogues how sin destroyed Israel in less than half a millennium as she fell from the height of Solomon’s reign to the utter depths in the destruction of Jerusalem and in exile under the Babylonians.

But the prophets, even amidst their strong denunciations, promised stunning hope beyond the exile for the remnant who would return to God. And it wouldn’t be the mere restoration to Israel’s former days, for as the prophet Isaiah announced, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

God had more in mind for the blessing of the nations than, “Come and see Israel and eat from her scraps.” In the Great Commission, we find Jesus’ monumental revelation to his followers—and through them to the world—of the mission for world blessing that God has had in store from the beginning: God’s people knowing and enjoying him in Jesus and going and telling all the nations about him.

As Jesus prepares to go to the cross, he is the one who promises, “This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations.” And Jesus is the one who charges his disciples to “disciple all nations” and promised them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in

Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

GO-AND-DISCIPLE

Jesus has ushered in a new season of world history in which God is no longer focusing his preparatory redemptive action on Israel in a come-and-see fashion (when “in past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways,” Acts 14:16). But now with the full accomplishment of the gospel of his Son, God has widened his scope, so to speak, to all the nations and inaugurated the Spirit-empowered age of go-and-tell—or better yet, go-and-disciple.

And so the apostle Paul says that the essence of his ministry is “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Jesus’] name among *all the nations*” (Rom. 1:5) and that the gospel is now being “made known to *all nations*” (Rom. 16:26). God’s global purpose, being exercised through the authority of the risen and reigning God-man, is to make worshipers of his Son among *all the nations*—every tribe and tongue and people.

When Jesus grants the apostle John a glimpse of the end, John hears a new song, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation*” (Rev. 5:9). Two chapters later, John sees “a great multitude that no one could number, *from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*, standing [in worship] before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9–10).

THE POST-CHRISTIAN WEST AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In pursuit of all nations, Paul brought the gospel to Philippi in Acts 16, and for the next seventeen-plus centuries, Christianity took root in particular in the West (Europe and eventually North America). The sixteenth-century Reformation deepened the roots in many respects, but the horrific seventeenth-century religious wars fed the eighteenth-century “Enlightenment” and with it modernism and secularism.

Today the West, once the stronghold of global Christianity, is becoming increasingly (and quickly) post-Christian. There are pockets of significant blessing and great hope for advance in the days ahead, but by and large,

the church that once stood at the center of Western society is finding herself at the periphery (which, in God's economy, may be a very good thing for the Western church).

But the slow decline of Christianity in the West has not meant global decline for the gospel. Jesus will build his church. The last 50 years have produced a stunning and historic global development as Christianity has blossomed in Africa, Latin America, and Asia—in what many are calling the “Global South.” The figures can be misleading, since they can report only *professing* Christians, but even allowing for significant inflation, the general trend is astonishing:

- Europe was home to over 70% of the world's professing Christians in 1900, but by 2000, it was less than 30%. In the meantime, Latin America and Africa had become home to over 40%.
- Africa had ten million professing Christians in 1900—about 10% of the population. But by 2000, the number was 360 million—about half the African population. This may mark the largest shift in religious affiliation in world history.⁹
- “The number of practicing Christians in China is approaching the number in the United States.”¹⁰
- “Last Sunday...more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so-called ‘Christian Europe.’”¹¹
- “In a word, the Christian church has experienced a larger geographical redistribution in the last fifty years than in any comparable period in its history, with the exception of the very earliest years of church history.”¹²

GOING WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

This amazing trend raises the question for some as to whether the West is finished sending missionaries. Will it not now be left to the Global South to finish the Commission? The clear answer is no. First, don't discount the

⁹Philip Jenkins, “Believing in the Global South” in *First Things*, December, 2006, No. 168, p. 13.

¹⁰Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity*, p. 10.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

power of gospel-advancing partnerships between the West and the Global South. But second, these partnerships should not mean merely sending Western money, but Western people. Going is necessary for discipling.

According to www.JoshuaProject.net (which tracks the global progress of the gospel among the world's unreached peoples), there are an estimated 6,550 unreached people groups in the world out of a total of about 16,300 ethno-linguistic peoples. The Joshua Project lists 1,540 of these unreached peoples as *unengaged*, meaning that there is no current missionary work among them. With so much work yet to be done, it will take the gospel-partnership of the whole global church—Western, Hispanic, Asian, African, Eastern European, Russian, Middle Eastern, and more—to take the message about Jesus to the world's final missionary frontier, the peoples most hostile to the gospel.

But not only does this new global situation create promise for new ways of partnering both in sending people and resources, it also gives rise to new possibilities and problems in the West.

THE PROMISE AND POTENTIAL DANGER OF MISSIONAL

In the last decade, a new term related to *missions* has come into use among evangelicals doing domestic ministry: *missional*. The most insightful of those using the term recognize that the West is quickly becoming post-Christian, and that this shift raises important questions about what it means to do domestic ministry. Europe and North America have become more and more like a mission field—but a post-Christian, rather than pre-Christian, one. Since the term *evangelism* carries for many the baggage of Christendom days when the general biblical worldview was prevalent enough in society that street-corner confrontations and stadium crusades found more traction and produced more genuine converts, the emergence of the term *missional* (in place of *evangelistic*) signifies that the times are changing in some significant degree, calling for new missions-like engagement. This new thinking is a good development, but with it comes a potential danger.

The potential danger is that with the discussions about “being missional” and “every Christian being a missionary,” the pursuit of all the peoples by prioritizing the unreached may be obscured. We need to preserve a place for the biblical category of reaching the unreached. The biblical theme is

not merely that God reaches as many *people* as possible, but *all the peoples*. He intends to create worshipers of his Son from every nation. The push for being *missional* captures something very important in the heart of God, but the danger is when it comes at the cost of something else essential in the heart of God: pursuing *all the nations*, not merely those who share our language and culture.

THE PRIORITY OF THE UNREACHED

We need *both-and*. Our churches should both pursue *mission* among our own people as well as *missions* among the world's unreached peoples. One way to sum it up is to say that we can't be truly *missional* without preserving a place for, and giving priority to, the pursuit of the unreached. It doesn't matter how much a church may say that she is being *missional*; she is not fully *missional* in the biblical sense if she is not pursuing both mission at home (traditionally called *evangelism*) among her native reached people as well as being an engaged sender in support of missionaries to the unreached.

As the West grows increasingly post-Christian, it is easy to see the obvious need for the gospel opening up around us to the neglect of the frontiers. Missions is a summons to the frontiers. And more and more those frontiers aren't the romantic "savages" living in the woods that make for the missions stories of the previous generation, like *Bruchko*, *Peace Child*, and *Through Gates of Splendor*. Today's "frontiers" are home to the globe's most hostile people to the gospel. Don't think jungles and loinclothes. Think flat, hot, and crowded in the world's urban mega-centers. God is bringing the unreached peoples out of the woods and into the cities for the completion of the Commission.

THERE WILL BE SUFFERING AND MARTYRDOM

Which means there will be suffering. Many of the 6,650 unreached peoples (and the 1,540 unengaged peoples) are unreached (and unengaged) for a reason. They are profoundly hostile to the gospel. But the suffering and martyrdom to come—and they will come¹³—will not be a setback for our sovereign Savior.

¹³It is generally accepted that there were more Christian martyrs in the twentieth century than the nineteen previous centuries combined.

Suffering is not only the consequence of completing the Commission, but it is God's appointed means by which he will show the superior worth of his Son to all the peoples. Just as it was "fitting that he...should make the founder of [our] salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb. 2:10), so it is fitting that God save a people from all the peoples from eternal suffering through the redemptive suffering of Jesus displayed in the temporal sufferings of his missionaries.

This is why Paul could rejoice in his sufferings—because he knew that in them he was "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). What is lacking in Jesus' sufferings is not their redemptive value but their personal presentation to the peoples he died to save. And in the sufferings and martyrdoms of missions, "the sent ones" fill up what is lacking by showing Jesus' superior value and pointing to his sufferings in their own.

So, yes, the call to the Great Commission is a call for martyrs, but it is not a call for kamikazes or colonial insensitivity. It is a call for shrewd missionaries captured for Jesus' worldwide fame and satisfied so deeply in him that they can say with Paul, "To die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

JESUS WILL BE WITH US (VERSE 20)

The power for life-reorienting giving for missions and life-risking going in missions, for suffering and for martyrdom, is the enjoyment of the one whom we preach. Missions is not only powered by Jesus' universal authority, founded on his finished work, and modeled in his ministry, but missions is sustained by the promise of his presence and the pleasure we have in him. He says "behold" to make sure he has our attention because this is really precious. "*Behold*, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

He will be with you. At the border of the "closed" country, in the learning of an arduous language, and in the disorientation of a new culture, he will be with you. In speaking the gospel when your hearers may turn on you, in persecution, and in jail, he will be with you. And when you're pressed to renounce the faith or die, he will be with you. He loves to be with his people to give them the grace to say with Martin Luther, from the heart,

*Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also.*

*The body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.*

Missions is about the worship of Jesus and the joy of all peoples. And as surely as Jesus is Lord of the universe, the Great Commission will be completed. He will build his church. He will be worshiped among every people. And in him will his redeemed people, from all the peoples, forever “rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8). To Jesus be the glory. Amen.

PART ONE:

**A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF
GOSPEL-CENTERED MISSION**

CHAPTER THREE

THE STORY OF HIS GLORY JOHN PIPER

Human beings, by nature, don't draw the same conclusions that God does from many facts, and we don't feel the same way God does about the conclusions that he draws from the facts. What I mean by human nature is a mind, an attitude, a bent that thinks badly about many things. It is found in phrases like, "by nature we are children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).

By nature, there is something wrong with us. We don't just do bad things; we have a bad nature. We might be able to say that two plus two is four, but then we do terrible things with that ability. Another text would be 1 Corinthians 2:14, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit because they are foolishness to him."

If God says something strange, we don't like it. We by nature regard lots of things that are true as foolish. So there's something wrong with us—when God draws conclusions from things that look strange to us, we get in his face and we disagree with him and call him into question.

The older I get, the more I see evidences of this in me and in other Christians in the way we read our Bibles and in the way we respond to providences. An example of this that is moving me into this issue of missions is: in order for us to have a heart for the nations—a heart for the unreached, close and distant, individuals and ethnic groups—in order for us to have a heart for the nations that is strong enough, deep enough, durable enough, God-centered enough, and Christ-exalting enough to be the kind of heart it should be, we need to base this heart for the nations on the same thing on which God bases his heart for the nations.

OUR THOUGHTS THE SAME AS GOD'S THOUGHTS

Now so far I don't think our thoughts would be different than God's thoughts. You know the text, "Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your ways are not my ways" (Isa. 55:8). That's because the mind of the flesh is at enmity with God, and we think all kinds of things that God doesn't think.

It doesn't mean that he can't and we can't think the same thought as unbelievers, like the earth is round instead of square. It means there are many facts from which God draws conclusions but from which we don't draw the same conclusions. And he feels about them ways we don't feel. But, so far in that little analogy, we're okay. We're thinking God's thoughts. So far we're saying in order for us to have the kind of heart for the nations that is durable enough and strong enough and deep enough and Christ-exalting enough and God-centered enough, in order to be what it ought to be, we need to base that heart for the nations on the same thing God does. So far, we're thinking like God, if we're there.

GOD'S PASSION FOR HIS OWN NAME AND GLORY

But when we see what God bases his heart for the nations on there are a lot of backs that get up, because what God bases his heart for the nations on is *his passion for his own name and his own glory*. I go all over the country and the world saying this, and I watch the reactions, I field the questions, and I have discovered for about thirty years now that this thought, that God would be jealous for his name and on the basis of that be given to pursue the nations and their salvation and their judgment in the measure that he decides, is alien to many believers, not to mention unbelievers.

Since that is so alien to us, what I want to do is to build my case that God bases his heart for the nations on his heart for himself. And in doing that I want to lay out texts, because what I think is of no consequence whatsoever if it doesn't correspond to biblical truth. The only thing you should care about is *Does what Piper says correspond to what the Bible teaches?* That's all that matters. My authority as a pastor isn't what counts, my being older than most of you isn't what counts, my having a certain level of education is not what counts. What counts is, *Does this man get under the Bible instead of over the Bible? Does he submit and then talk plainly about what he finds here, in such a way that ordinary folks can say, 'Yes, that must be what it says and what it means, because there it is.'*

GOD'S HEART FOR GOD

God's heart for the nations is built on God's heart for God. God's zeal to reach the nations with the glory of his Son and save sinners is built on his

zeal that his name be exalted in and through the worshipping of Christ. That's the argument. And the way to argue for it, I think, is to simply look at an array of texts that show that God does everything for the sake of magnifying his glory.

GOD'S ULTIMATE GOAL

Here's my thesis: *God's ultimate goal in creation and redemption is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of his redeemed people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.* This is the main thing. This is God's ultimate goal, and it happens to be for the enjoyment of his redeemed people. And those people, in God's design, happen to be of every people and tribe and tongue and nation. Oh, how I would love to make the case that this diversity, this cultural and ethnic and racial diversity here, is essential to this! God did not make us as different as we are culturally, ethnically, and racially for nothing. It's not an accident. It's not a punishment after the tower of Babel. This is because a diverse song sung to the Redeemer is more glorifying to the Redeemer than a simple song in unison. If we all sang one note, from one culture, from one ethnicity, from one race, it would have a loud and glorious sound, but oh, it would not look or sound like the song that will be sung to the Redeemer from such diversity as he is winning it from. But that's for another time...

God's main, ultimate goal is to uphold and display his glory. That is the seemingly offensive thing to many people. It just sounds so self-centered, self-exalting, and feels bad to people. The key to why God's self-exaltation, that is, the pursuit of the magnifying of his own glory, is not vicious but virtuous, not unloving but loving, is this word *enjoyment*. He is doing it for the enjoyment of his people. If God did not preserve and exalt his glory, you would not be given the very thing that you were designed to be most satisfied by, namely God, and God's glory. He is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the greatest act of love. When you stand in front of God, if you're thinking God's thoughts and not the world's thoughts, what you want is for God to say, *Hey, stand in front of me and watch THIS!* And then for him to be God, in his fullness of grace and justice, so that you can spend eternity enjoying that and going deeper into that.

GOD IS A CROWN OF GLORY

Consider Isaiah 28:5: “In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, for his remnant.” What will it mean that he will be a crown of glory? Whose head will it be on? He’s the crown. He is not the head. It’s going to be on your head. Take a deep breath. He will be a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty. In other words, he will satisfy every longing for glory and beauty. Everything good that you ever longed for will be satisfied in him.

Therefore, it is loving for him to lift himself up and say, *Here I am, world! Admire!* If you did that, you would be unloving, because you are not all-satisfying. He is. You should simply go all over the world, pointing to him. Say: *World, look!* Look at Christ especially, because there, when Christ died, the glory of the grace of God was magnified, which is the apex of all his glory, which is why Christ is the center of everything.

TO THE PRAISE AND THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE

The texts we are going to look at were not chosen for theological reasons. I am a lover of this doctrine, predestination. I choose it because it is chronologically first in the universe, no, first in reality, *before* the universe. Look at Ephesians 1.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:3-6)

I’ll paraphrase that: God, before the foundation of the world, set his heart on being praised, because it’s the ultimate thing. Choosing, predestining, adopting are all means. Jesus was a means, at this point. And the goal is, the purpose is, that we *praise the glory of his grace*, which was supremely manifested in Jesus, which was planned before the foundation of the world.

So there's my first argument: *From the beginning, in God, before we existed, God's design was to get praise for his glorious grace.*

IMAGES ARE CREATED TO IMAGE

The next item in my chronology is creation. This is Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Books by the hundreds have been written on the *imago dei*, as it's called. It's a huge issue. Is it reason, is it emotion, is it that we have moral accountability? How are we like God? I'm going to avoid the whole controversy and say something much simpler: Images are created to image. Right? Why do you ever set up an image of anything? To image it! You put up a statue of Stalin, you want people to look at Stalin and think about Stalin. You put up a statue of George Washington, look at it and think about the founding fathers. Images are made to image. So if God made us, unlike all the other animals, in his image, whatever it means in detail, this it means clearly: God's the reality and we're the image. Images are created to set forth the reality.

Why did God create man? To show God! He created little images so that they would talk and act and feel in a way that reveals the way God is. So people would look at the way you behave, look at the way you think, the way you feel, and say, God must be great, God must be real. *That* is why you exist. God didn't create you as an end in yourself. He's the end, you're the means. And the reason that's such good news is because the best way to show that God is infinitely valuable is to be supremely happy in him. If God's people are bored with God, they are really bad images. God is not unhappy about himself. He is infinitely excited about his own glory.

That's why the Son received the words: *You are my beloved son. With*

you I am well pleased. Take those words, “Well pleased.” God doesn’t say he’s okay with Jesus. He’s not just okay with Jesus! He is absolutely thrilled with Jesus as the image of himself. So if we go about the world making our choices in what we watch on television, do on the computer, handle money, use food, so that it communicates to the world that these things are our treasure, rather than God, that these things make us satisfied rather than God, he’s getting the bad press, and we’re not doing what we were created to do. We were created to image God. So, God predestined for his glory and he created for the display of his glory.

GOD ACTS FOR THE SAKE OF HIS NAME

Staying in chronological order, we’re moving to the Exodus next. This is Ezekiel 20:5-9:

Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day when I chose Israel, I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, making myself known to them in the land of Egypt; I swore to them, saying, I am the LORD your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands. And I said to them, Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.

Now right here we begin to see something that’s going to climax in the

cross of Christ, namely, that the ground of the deliverance of a rebellious people is God's jealousy for his name. If God, at this point, had not been supremely jealous for his name, wrath would have fallen upon the people of Israel:

Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and
spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of
Egypt. (v. 8b)

That's what they deserved. But something checked that just disposition in God, namely,

But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be
profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they
lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in
bringing them out of the land of Egypt. (v. 9)

SALVATION EVIDENCE OF GOD'S WRATH

Get that principle. There are so many Christians today who see the salvation of God as an evidence of their worth instead of God's worth. That doesn't work here. It just doesn't work. When they walked through the sea on dry land, what should they say? *We must be really good!* No! They deserved wrath, and they got deliverance, because God is really great, and meant to be known as great.

Here is the way Psalm 106:6-8 puts it:

Both we and our fathers have sinned; we have committed
iniquity; we have done wickedness. Our fathers, when they
were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works;
they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast
love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved
them for his name's sake, that he might make known his
mighty power.

Oh, how thankful I am for worship leaders who get this, who are constantly

saying, *We're going to glory in our Redeemer! We're not going to glory in the fact that saving me must mean I am glorious. We're not going to talk like that.* That doesn't satisfy the soul. That's the carnal mind using the cross to buttress its ego. There are many people that do that, but the cross crucifies the ego and puts all worth on Jesus and the Father.

WHY TEN PLAGUES?

Now to the book of Exodus itself. God says:

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them,
and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the
Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. (Exod. 14:4)

That is really strong language. I don't know if you've ever asked why God used ten plagues to deliver Israel from Egypt instead of one. If you thought like the world you might think, "Well, he did his best for nine and then he really pulled the trump card at ten and it worked." That's not the case, because we read at the beginning of the story that he was going to multiply his signs in Egypt. He didn't start with one and hope it worked, and then went to two and hope it worked, and went to three and hope it worked, and finally, the tenth plague works and he says, "Whew! I don't know how long this might have lasted." That's totally foreign to the context. God *planned* to multiply his signs in Egypt. Why? Because he meant to get glory over Pharaoh, who was so against God. He meant to magnify himself. The Exodus, which is a pointer to our exodus from sin, was based upon God's zeal for his name. This is a huge event in redemptive history, is it not?

HEALTHY JEALOUSY

A few months after the exodus came the giving of the law:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God

am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me... (Exod. 20:3–5)

“Have no gods before me because I’m jealous.” What does jealous mean here? There is some jealousy that is bad, and there is some jealousy that is good. I just did some premarital counseling recently, and I looked at some personality things that I saw, and I queried them about how he would feel if she hung out with her women friends after they were married, and he with his men friends, and other things. I probed because I was scratching for unhealthy jealousy: “You’re mine! You be home every night! You give everything to me!” Now, that would be unhealthy jealousy.

There is, however, a very healthy jealousy. If Noël decides she’s interested in another man, if she starts hanging out long hours at Starbucks with him, having deep conversations about her heart, and gets farther and farther from my heart, I should be really angry. And God is really angry when we hang out in inappropriate ways with the world. Why? Because we’re designed to bestow all the glory on him, to get our deepest and most profound satisfaction from him. He is intending to say in the law, *I’m number one, period! And you’ll be destroyed if you don’t agree.* Now that kind of talk really turns people off. But you need to say it like that just to wake some people up to how carnal and self-centered they are. That’s the law.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness a long time. Why? Why did he spare them? These were really, really rebellious folks, like us.

But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. (Ezek. 20:13–14)

We've seen that before. It happens over and over again in the history of Israel.

GOSPEL BEFORE THE GOSPEL

We will skip the conquest of Canaan and move to the Israelites asking for a king. I love this passage because it is so full of gospel before the gospel. We saw the gospel in the exodus, that the salvation of a rebellious people was rooted not in their worth, but in God's worth. And here we're going to see it again. The people have asked to have a king like the nations, and Samuel's not happy about that, and God's angry about that. So what happens?

And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king."
And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. (1 Sam. 12:19-20a)

I don't remember how many years ago it was, but there was a point where I read this and I thought, that is a very strange connection. The connection between "fear not" and "you have done all this evil" is really weird. It should be, "Fear! You have done all this evil! Fear!" But it says, "Fear not, you have done all this evil." That's gospel. That's what I mean by gospel. This is undeserved grace, undeserved mercy. Why? What's the basis of it?

Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake... (1 Sam. 12:20-22a)

So in the Exodus the people were delivered and not shown wrath because God was jealous for his name in Egypt. Here the people have committed treason and impeached God and said, "We want another kind of king. We want to be like the nations. We don't like this theocracy business. We want

another king.” Later they called it sin, when Samuel preached to them and then said “don’t be afraid.” Samuel could have said “Don’t be afraid because God is merciful, God is gracious, God keeps covenant love.” He could have said all these things and they would be true, but what he said was “the Lord will not cast away his people for his great name’s sake.” How do you pray in response to that?

HOW DO YOU PRAY?

I remember back at Fuller Seminary, my world was being blown to smithereens in the spring of 1969, and then the next year as well. I went through Copernican revolutions because all the stars must come crashing down in order to rebuild your world when you’ve been man-centered all your life. Noël and I had just gotten married in December of 1968 so she was walking through this with me. We had this beige couch in the living room of that little back house on Orange Grove Boulevard (we paid \$85 a month for that whole house). We knelt by that beige couch and prayed every night as a young couple and I remember saying to Noël, “You know, you can tell when somebody’s theology is being turned upside down by the way they pray.” Because we just were praying differently. Texts like “hallowed be thy name” were just exploding. That wasn’t a throwaway phrase anymore! “Hallowed be your name” was a request to God to make himself strong in the world and great in our hearts. So I’m asking you, *How does your discovery of God affect your praying?*

Here’s one way:

For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. (Ps. 25:11)

Do you pray that way? Does that kind of thinking come to your mind? It sure didn’t come to my mind until I had my eyes open to texts, hundreds of them, like that.

We do say this now, just in other words. We say, *In Jesus’ name I pray, amen*. Because that’s the name. On this side of the cross, we know the name. It’s Jesus. God has put his son forward to exalt his own righteousness and preserve his own justice in the saving of sinners, so that when we call down

mercy, totally underserved, who are we going to appeal to—ourselves? Nothing works except: *For your name's sake, O Lord. Make your name great in forgiving my sins and using me, broken and imperfect as I am.*

Or how about:

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
(Ps. 23:3)

Why does he sanctify you? How do you pray for sanctification? *Lord, lead me in paths of righteousness for your name's sake today. I want you to look great today.*

BROKENNESS BEFORE JOY

Noël and I had a rocking chair that I bought for her when we had our first baby in Germany. I sat in that chair every Sunday night. There were no Sunday evening events in Germany, and I read for about a year—maybe not quite—the *Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards. Two or three pages a night—I don't know how many pages. I could not take much of that book. It was absolutely convicting. I recommend it to everybody. People ask me, "Where should we start in reading Jonathan Edwards?" I say, *Religious Affections*, not *Freedom of the Will*. That's really hard. But *Religious Affections*, you can handle that intellectually. But you won't handle it morally; it will wipe you out.

Ezekiel 36 jumped off the page in the chapter on evangelical humiliation, which is actually the title.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes....It is not for

your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. (Ezek. 36:22–32)

The reason that blew me away in 1972 is because I was surrounded by books on self-esteem. I wrote reviews of two of them for *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. It was red-hot gospel coming out of the world into the church in those days, the gospel of self-esteem. And as I read this, I said, “None of those books would ever quote this text. They would never, ever, ever say, “It is not for your sake I will act, says the Lord. Let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your sins, O house of Israel.”

There must be genuine, devastating brokenness before leaping for joy at the cross. The cross first says, *It is because of you that I am here*. That’s what it says, meaning, *Your sin is so horrible it requires the death of the Son of God for God to be vindicated in the saving of your soul*. It was a missing emotional piece, I think, toward completing my life.

JESUS GLORIFYING THE FATHER

We see the same thing in the New Testament. Jesus said:

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.. (Jn. 17:4)

In accomplishing the work that Jesus received from the Father, he was glorifying the Father. And in John 7:18 Jesus said:

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

God sent Jesus to get glory for God. God sent Jesus to get glory for God! That’s why he sent him.

Romans 15:8-9 says:

For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

The reason God sent Jesus to the Gentiles was so that they would glorify God for his mercy.

There are two thoughts here: glorify God, and bestow mercy. How do they relate? I have talked with a lot of seminary students over the years that have been charged with writing integration papers for their seminary experience, meaning, *Put it all together in a paper. Choose the integrating ultimate reality and write a paper with your whole theology around that.* And the ways divide in talking with people, because they often choose mercy. Mercy is infinitely glorious, and I wouldn't begrudge anybody writing a paper that integrates the whole Bible around mercy. But it's not the most ultimate thing. You can see it in the grammar: *That the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.* What does that little preposition *for* mean there? *Glorify God for his mercy.* Wouldn't you paraphrase that, *Glorify God on the basis of his mercy?* That is, the experience of mercy prompts the glorifying of God for the mercy. And if that's the case, which I think it is, then it's the glorifying of God which is ultimate, and the receiving of mercy is penultimate.

But you don't have to choose. If we had to choose, there would be no gospel. God gets the glory, we get the mercy, and that's the best of all possible worlds. I wouldn't want it any other way. The natural mind says, *No, I really can't be happy unless I get the glory, and I don't like a God who doesn't need a little bit of mercy.* You hear people talk about forgiving God. I've got to watch my language when I hear things like that.

Romans contains the most important paragraph in the bible, probably. It's dangerous to say things like that, but if I had to choose, it would be somewhere in Romans 8 or somewhere in Romans 3.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
(Rom. 3:23)

Paul sets up the issue in terms of glory, because back in Romans 1 we read that we have all exchanged the glory of God for images, especially the one in the mirror. So Romans 1:23d:

...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

You get to Romans 3:23, and it says: *We have fallen short*; which is literally, we *lack*. We lack because we have traded the glory of God for lesser things. We have turned away from it and embraced our favorite glory. *All have sinned*, and that's what sin is. Preferring another glory to God's glory is what sin is. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.

HOW GOD JUSTIFIES SINNERS

Now here is how God justifies sinners: *By his grace, as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a expiation by his blood—or propitiation—better... by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show...* So here's the aim.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:25–26)

God saves you through the horrible price of the death of his son, because in saving you he passes over your sins and that has to be vindicated. If God passes over sins in the Old Testament and in your life, if he just passes them over, what does it look like? Sins belittle the glory of God, making his glory of little value. How then can God be righteous and forgive you? And the answer is, he killed his son to show how serious sin is. He bruised his son in order to magnify the worth of his glory.

Which turns the Christian life now into the verse that my dad quoted to me more than any other, I think:

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

Everything in redemptive history has been God acting for his glory, therefore everything in your life is to join him in that purpose. The reason you're on the planet is to join God in making much of God. Every human being that you'll ever meet, anywhere in the world, in any culture, according to Romans 5, is disobedient and rebellious and needs to be justified by faith alone. They've all stopped glorifying God for who he really is and we go to call them back to glorify God.

WHY IS JESUS COMING BACK?

Here's another text from 1 Peter:

...whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)

I pray this more than any other text, I suppose, as we meet downstairs before the services:

Why is Jesus coming back? We're jumping all the way to the end now, the second coming. One last text, 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10:

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Second Thessalonians 1 gives us two reasons why the Son of God is

returning to earth: to be glorified and to be marveled at. I never thought that for the first 22 years of my life. Anybody asked me why Jesus is coming back, I'd say, *He's coming back to get me. Coming back to save me.* And that's true. It's just skewed. I was ignorant. My mind was not his mind. My thoughts were not his thoughts. They weren't based on what God's thoughts are based on. The Son of God is coming to be glorified, and the reason that is love is because your joy at that moment will consist in making much of him!

ADMIRING THE MOST ADMIRABLE

Ayn Rand, the atheistic philosopher novelist, said in *Atlas Shrugged*: "Admiration is the rarest of pleasures." Now in her mouth, that was absolutely scornful, meaning, *There aren't any admirable people in the world, except me and a few philosopher business types.* But in my mouth, that means I am made, unlike all other animals, to admire. And my deepest joy will consist in admiring the most admirable. And there is only one who is most admirable: Christ, the image of God fully. And when he comes, my fullest joy will consist in fulfilling the purpose for which he came, namely to be admired. So his glory and my joy come together.

Now, if you embraced this, then when you talk about, "for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9–10), you know why he's doing that, why Jesus came, why he bought people from every ethnic group, why we send out missionaries. And the answer from Romans 1 is, *For the sake of the name.*

So all of that, simply to lay a foundation here at the beginning of this volume, that if we want our heart for the nations to rest upon God's heart for the nations, it should rest upon the basis of God's heart for the nations, namely, God's heart for his own glory.

CHAPTER FOUR

THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH ARE THE SONS OF ABRAHAM

MARCH 20, 1983

JOHN PIPER

Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Galatians 3:6–9

CAN YOU BE A CHILD OF ABRAHAM?

The Word of God from this text for us today is that anyone—Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, white or black or brown, quick-witted or slow, old or young—anyone can be a child of Abraham and inherit the blessings promised to Abraham’s children, if you live by faith.

The structure of the text is simple. The main point is stated in two different ways, once in verse 7 and once in verse 9. And each of these is preceded by its Old Testament support. Verse 6 quotes Genesis 15:6, “Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’” And verse 7 draws out of that verse together with verse 5 a general inference: “So (or: therefore) you see that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham.” The thing that makes a person a “son of Abraham” is faith. Then verse 8 quotes Genesis 12:3 (and 18:18), “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” And verse 9 draws out the inference, “So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.” The thing that qualifies a person to inherit Abraham’s blessing is faith. So the main point—the Word of God for us today (expressed in verses 7 and 9)—is that anyone of us who lives by faith is a child of Abraham and will inherit Abraham’s blessing.

I can think of at least two reasons why most modern people would simply shrug their shoulders at this announcement. One reason is that they have no idea what it means to be a child of Abraham and no sense of the stupendous value of the blessing promised to Abraham's children. And the other reason is that they can't see how a 20th century American who doesn't have a Jewish cell in his body can be called a child of Abraham. In other words, if this promise in Galatians 3:6–9 is going to strengthen our faith and increase our joy, we have to dig in and see what it means and how it is grounded in the Old Testament. And that's my aim: the advancement and joy of your faith (Philippians 1:25), because I know that genuine faith works itself out in love (Gal. 5:6), and when people see the sacrificial love of God's people, many are gripped and give glory to him (Matt. 5:16). So for the sake of our faith, our love, and ultimately, of God's glory, let's see how Paul gets verses 7 and 9 out of the Old Testament, and what they mean for us today.

NOT DEPENDENT ON PHYSICAL DESCENT

A great deal in this passage hangs on what it means to be a child of Abraham. So let's try to answer that question first. The first thing that needs to be said is that Paul thinks sonship does not depend on physical descent. For example, in Galatians 3:28, 29 he says,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

So the first thing to be said is that Jews and non-Jews can be offspring or children or sons of Abraham. Sonship does not depend on physical descent. Romans 9:6, 7 confirm this:

Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham just because they are descendants.

But we don't even have to go beyond our text to see this. Aren't verses 7 and 9 referring to the same group of people? Verse 7 says that "those of faith are sons of Abraham." And verse 9 says that "those of faith are blessed with Abraham." Surely, these are the same people: sons of Abraham, who will, therefore, enjoy the blessings promised to Abraham and his children. But it is clear from the connection between verses 8 and 9 that these people include Gentiles. Verse 8 quotes Genesis 12:3, "In you shall all the nations (i.e., Gentiles) be blessed"—not just Jews. And from that Paul infers verse 9: "So then, those of faith are blessed." So the believers of verse 9 must include Gentiles, and since these are the same as the believers in verse 7 who are called sons of Abraham, the sons of Abraham must include Gentiles. That's the first thing about being a son of Abraham: *it does not depend on physical descent from Abraham.*

I know it sounds strange to us, but it is very close to the heart of the gospel: white, Anglo-Saxon protestants can become sons of Abraham; Hispanics and Laotians and Cambodians can become sons of Abraham; black African Muslims can become sons of Abraham; anti-semitic, redneck Nazi vigilantes can become sons of Abraham; Hitler could have become a son of Abraham.

WAS PAUL'S VIEW BIBLICAL?

Before we ask what that sonship involves and why it is good news, we need to ask whether Paul's view of Abrahamic sonship is the same as the Old Testament's view. It is no good telling our Jewish friends that we are sons of Abraham if they can simply point to the Torah and show us that Paul has distorted what Moses taught. Turn with me to Genesis 12:1–3. Here is the foundational promise of the Jewish people.

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse, and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

When God chose Abram to found a new nation, he made sure that Abram knew that the Jewish people were being created for the world. Their mission is to “be a blessing.” Their destiny is to serve all the nations. (Gen. 18:18 says the same thing, and uses “nations,” i.e., Gentiles, instead of “families.”) This is the text Paul quotes in Galatians 3:8, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

But is this blessing which the nations get the same as sonship? Is there any clue in Genesis that the nations would be blessed in Abraham because they would become his sons? Yes, there is in Genesis 17. Here God spells out the terms of his covenant with Abraham and says in verses 4 and 5,

Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

Some have tried to refer the “nations” here to the Ishmaelites and Edomites, who can trace their physical descent to Abraham. But surely the word “multitude” in Genesis 17:4, 5 means more than two. Surely God has in view here the same nations that will be blessed in Genesis 12:3 and 18:18, namely, “all the families (nations) of the earth.” In other words, Genesis 17:4 explains how the nations of Genesis 12:3 and 18:18 are going to be blessed. They are going to be blessed because Abraham will become their father. They are going to be blessed by becoming sons of Abraham. So it does not look as though Paul has distorted the Old Testament when he teaches that Gentiles can be sons of Abraham. That’s the first thing we need to see about Abraham’s children—they include more than Jews. They can include you and me. (See Romans 4:16 and 17 to confirm that Genesis 17:4 lies behind Paul’s thinking about Gentile sonship.)

MUST BE LIKE ABRAHAM

The second thing to notice about being a child of Abraham is that it means being like Abraham. In John 8:39 the Jews defend themselves against Jesus’ criticisms by saying,

“Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did.”

Jesus shows us two things in this response. First, he shows us that they are not Abraham’s children, even though they are Jews—and so he confirms our first point, that being a child of Abraham is not the same as Jewishness. And the second thing he shows us is that being a child of Abraham means being like Abraham—doing what he does: “If you were Abraham’s children you would do what Abraham did.” In Galatians 3:6 what Abraham did was believe God. “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). Then Paul infers from this in verse 7, “So you see, it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham.” Abraham was a man of faith, so if you do what he did, if you have faith, you will be his child.

So the first thing we said about being children of Abraham is that it’s not the same as being a physical descendant. Anyone here can become a child of Abraham. Now the second thing we’ve said is that being a child of Abraham involves doing what he did—not in every particular, of course, but in the essential thing, namely, believing God’s promises. Abraham believed God; therefore, those of faith are children of Abraham.

HEIRS OF BLESSING OF ABRAHAM

The third thing to say about sons of Abraham is that they are heirs of the blessing to Abraham and his descendants. Galatians 3:29 makes this especially clear:

If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Remember, this comes right after verse 28 which shows that Paul has in mind here male and female, slave and free, Jew and Greek. The most astonishing thing asserted here is that Greeks—uncircumcised Gentiles!—are heirs of the promises made to Abraham. You and I can become beneficiaries of God’s promises to Abraham if we have the faith of Abraham and belong to Jesus Christ. (Romans 4:16 and 17 also show that Gentiles are made heirs of “the promise” because of faith. See also Galatians 3:14 and 4:30.)

Those are the three things I wanted to say about being children of Abraham: 1) It is not the same thing as being Jewish—Gentiles can be included; 2) it means being like Abraham, especially trusting the promises of God like Abraham did; 3) it means inheriting the blessings promised to Abraham.

So the question that begs to be answered now is: What are those blessings? Is there anything in this inheritance that should interest a 20th century American businessman, housewife, student, professional, laborer, teenager, senior citizen? I think there is. I'll mention two of them—two things that you inherit if you are a child of Abraham. And each of these is promised in order to take away a fear that you have (or ought to have): 1) The fear of meeting an infinitely holy God loaded with all your sin; and, 2) the fear of death.

THE PROMISE OF JUSTIFICATION

First, if you are a child of Abraham, part of your guaranteed inheritance is the bequest of justification. And only justification can take away your fear of meeting God loaded with your sin. Notice Galatians 3:8,

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

This verse teaches that the reason the Scripture promises blessing to the nations through Abraham is that God intended to justify people from every nation.

Since the Scripture saw God justifying the Gentiles... therefore the Scripture promised blessing to the Gentiles through Abraham.

So the promised blessing of Abraham must involve justification. And you recall from the connection between Genesis 12:3 and 17:4 that the reason the nations will be blessed is because Abraham becomes their father. They become his children. Therefore, justification is part of our inheritance as children of Abraham. If you are his child, then, and only then, you

are justified.

Which means that in spite of all your sins, God reckons you to be righteous. If you are a child of Abraham, all the things you have done wrong or ever will do wrong are forgiven because of Christ, and God does not hold your sins against you. I don't know of any cultural, intellectual, or technological changes over the past two thousand years that makes this inheritance any less needed or less desirable today than it was for the Galatians. This and this alone can take away the fear of meeting an infinitely holy God loaded with our sin. So the first thing we inherit from God as children of Abraham is justification, acquittal of all our sin. (And this is the basis for all the other blessings!)

THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

Second, if you are a child of Abraham, part of your guaranteed inheritance is the Spirit of God who seals you for eternal life. Only the Spirit can take away the fear of death and hell and replace it with the hope of eternal life. Notice two key texts from Galatians which make this plain. Galatians 3:14 says that Christ became a curse for us,

that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

This verse teaches that part of Abraham's blessing which we Gentiles can inherit is the gift of the Spirit. One of the marks of the children of Abraham is that they are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ (2:20; 4:6, 29).

The connection between this and eternal life is then brought out in Galatians 6:8,

He who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

The only ground out of which eternal life can be harvested is the ground of the Spirit. If you plant your life in the flesh, if you count on what you can

achieve and enjoy in this world, then the harvest you will get is corruption, death, and hell, for that is an immeasurable insult to God who offers himself to you in the Spirit. But if you plant your life in the Spirit and count on what he can do through you and for you, the harvest you will get is eternal life. So when Galatians 3:14 says that the Spirit is a part of our inheritance as children of Abraham, it implies that only the children of Abraham will enjoy eternal life. And that takes away the fear of death and hell, which is just as real and terrible in the 20th century as it was in the first. (Note: the Spirit is not explicitly promised to Abraham in Genesis. It is promised to God's people in Joel 2 and Ezekiel 36. Paul's assumption is that whatever goes into making the children of Abraham what they ought to be is a fulfillment of God's intention in the promise to Abraham. See Genesis 17:7.)

In summary, we have seen five things about what it means to be children of Abraham. 1) It is not the same as physical descent from Abraham. Even 20th century Gentiles can be Abraham's sons. 2) It implies being like Abraham, a chip off the old block, as it were, especially in his life of faith. 3) If you are a child of Abraham, you inherit the blessing of Abraham. You become the beneficiary of the promises God made to his children. That means 4) you are justified, acquitted by God of all your sins on the basis of Christ's death in your place. And finally, 5) if you are Abraham's child, you have the Spirit who will lead you into eternal life.

FAITH AND SONSHIP

Therefore, it is surely no overstatement this morning to say that the most important concern of your life is to make sure that you are a child of Abraham. So I close with an observation from our text and an illustration. The text makes plain that the only way to be a child of Abraham is to live by faith. Literally, Galatians 3:7 says,

Know therefore that those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham.

The test of whether you are of faith is not whether you once made a decision somewhere in the past, but whether your life is a life of faith. The child of Abraham can say without insincerity,

I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20)

I end with an illustration. Picture heaven as Orchestra Hall and the music of the symphony as the glory of God. Everybody here knows that faith is the precondition for entering that hall and enjoying that music. But some of you, I fear, have gotten the notion that trusting in Christ is like buying a ticket to Orchestra Hall once for all, and that you can put this ticket away in your pocket as the guarantee of your admission someday, even though the affections of your life are captured by the music of this world. That is not a biblical view of saving faith. It's a delusion.

Faith is a precondition for enjoying the symphony of God's glory not in the sense of getting a ticket, but in the sense of getting an ear for heaven's music. The real precondition of enjoying the music of heaven throughout eternity is a new heart which delights in the things of God, not a decision card which you carry in your pocket to ease your conscience while your mind is captivated by the delights of this world.

CHAPTER FIVE

IF YOU ARE CHRIST'S, YOU ARE HEIRS OF THE PROMISE

JOHN PIPER

MAY 1, 1983

Galatians 3:23–29

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

I see four steps in Paul's thought in Galatians 3:23–29. First, before faith came Israel was confined under the law, which functioned like a custodian (or tutor or governess), which gave restraint and guidance but couldn't give or ensure the promised inheritance (3:18). Second, Christ came and with him a great movement of faith. Third, wherever men and women unite with Christ by faith (symbolized in baptism), they are justified, and become children of God and heirs of his promise to Abraham. Fourth, therefore, we who are in Christ are no longer under the law. Let's try to understand each of these steps in the paragraph.

CONFINED UNDER LAW

The first step is taken in verses 23 and 24,

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law,

kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came.

The word *custodian* refers to a servant of the family responsible to watch over the son, from the nursery to his entrance upon manhood. He governs the child's behavior until the child has the maturity to do what is right without external constraints. The "custodian" or "tutor" or "schoolmaster" does not have the power to make the child's heart good, nor can he give the child his inheritance.

That's how the law functioned for Israel. It provided direction and restraint. It prescribed the way a mature child should behave. But it could not give Israel a new heart nor could it give the inheritance. And according to Hebrews 4:2, the reason the law did not benefit Israel was that it did not meet with faith. Faith is the mark of maturity which the law prescribed, and so the law kept Israel under restraint until faith came. The law instructed youthful Israel how to live a life of faith in the merciful promises of God (cf. Exodus 14:31; Numbers 14:11; 20:12; Deuteronomy 1:32; 8:17; 9:23; 28:52; 32:37); but the response was, by and large, adolescent rebellion. Israel, for the most part, did not humble themselves, and so the law functioned to expose Israel's sin and hold them under restraint until the day when God began to take away the blindness and give them a heart to trust him (Jeremiah 24:7).

And the law works that way today, too. If you don't have a heart to trust God and rely on mercy, the law will feel like a burdensome, offensive, deadening job description given by a harsh schoolmaster. But if you do have a heart to trust God and rely on his mercy, then the law will feel like a much-needed and desired prescription from a wise and beloved Physician. What the law is for you depends on what you are toward the Law-giver. First John 5:3 says, "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." But for Israel the law was by and large a burdensome job description for earning their blessing, because it did not meet with faith. (There were obvious exceptions, as Psalm 1 and 119 show.)

FAITH HAS COME

The second step in Paul's thought is that faith has now come. It's coming is simultaneous with the coming of Christ. Verse 25,

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian.

What does he mean: "Faith has come"? I don't think he can mean that no one in Israel had saving faith before Christ came. Abraham did (Gal. 3:6). And Psalm 32 portrays a man whom the Lord reckons righteous by faith apart from works (Rom. 4:6–8). Hebrews 11 gives a believers' hall of fame from the time of the law. So Paul does not mean that no one had faith before Christ came, or that justification was by works before Christ came. There were believers who were justified by faith all along; Paul says 7,000 in the time of Elijah (Rom. 11:4).

I think what Paul means when he says that "faith has come," is that by God's grace a period in redemptive history has come in which great numbers of people, especially Gentiles, are responding to God's Word in faith. "Faith has come" means that a great movement has begun whose members are marked by this above all else—they trust like little children in the mercy of God. When the law was preached, it was met with very little faith. But when the gospel is preached, many believe and are saved. The movement has spread around the world. The reason for this is not that the law taught men to earn salvation while the gospel offers salvation freely to faith. No, both the law and the gospel offer salvation freely to faith, and both describe the obedience that shows the genuineness of this faith. The reason why the law mostly shut people up in sin while the gospel wins faith from large numbers is that the preaching of the gospel is accompanied by a powerful work of the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of the listeners (Acts 16:14; 2 Cor. 4:6). "Faith has come" means that God is fulfilling the promises of Ezek. 36:26 and 27 to give new hearts (Jer. 24:7; Deut. 30:6).

If God were not causing the gospel of Christ to be accompanied by the convicting, opening work of the Spirit, the gospel would shut us under sin just like the law did. But that was not God's plan. And every one of us here who lives by faith in the Son of God is living evidence that by the sovereign,

effectual grace of the Holy Spirit “faith has come”—even to us, and taken up residence in our hearts, and made us new. If you know the hardness of your own heart apart from renewing grace, you thank God every day that you are a believer.

UNITED TO CHRIST

The third step in the text is that faith in Christ so unites us to him that all the benefits he can give become ours. I took the family to see *The Black Stallion Returns* last Thursday. A boy named Alec Ramsey stows away on a plane and flies to North Africa, trying to get back his horse. Then he begins to cross the desert, and he is told something about the tribesmen of the desert that saves his life and his mission. He hears that they have such a high sense of honor that if you say you want to be their guest, they will stake their life and possessions on protecting you. So even though Alec was totally broke and could not purchase protection and help, yet he got their protection and care twice by simply declaring his need and desire to be their guest. He appealed to their honor, not his worth. And he was saved.

That's how it is with Christ. If you entrust yourself to Christ, and say you want to be his eternal guest, and wear his garments, and accept his customs, his honor is at stake; he cannot refuse you. You have so honored his value and trustworthiness, that he would be denying himself to turn you away. And so all he has is yours. Foremost in verse 24 is justification—that is, acquittal of all guilt, forgiveness of all sin. Then, as verse 26 says, sonship. To belong to Christ is to be a child of God with all the stupendous privileges implied in that relationship. Another way to say the same thing is verse 29:

If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

To be a descendant of Abraham and to be a child of God are virtually the same in Paul's mind. You become both when you entrust yourself to Christ and say, “I want to be your guest.”

And one of the most wonderful things in Christ's household where guests become family members is that our own racial, social, and sexual

status does not make us any more or less than child and heir. Verse 28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female.

Woe to the presumptuous guest who thinks that his Jewishness or free status or maleness has won his admission to the Lord's house, or merits a greater share of the inheritance. Ephesians 2:19 says that Jews and Gentiles in Christ are "fellow citizens...and members of the household of God." Ephesians 6:9 says that masters and slaves have but one master in heaven, who shows no partiality. And 1 Peter 3:7 says that husbands and wives are joint-heirs of the grace of life in Christ. When Christ admits us into his protection and care by faith alone ("May I be your guest?"), every possible ground for boasting is removed, whether racial, social, or sexual. We are all utterly dependent on the honor of Christ, not our value or our distinctives. And nothing is more secure than the honor of Christ.

NO MORE CUSTODIAN

Finally, the fourth step is simply this: we are no longer under the custodian, the law. We will talk more about this next week. But this morning let me just say this. Being "under the custodian" or "under law" means here being oppressed by God's demand when you have no power to fulfill it. You either rebel against it, or you try forever to keep it in your own strength. In either case "the letter kills" (2 Cor. 3:6).

But that is no longer our relation to the law. We are not under it any more, desperately trying to climb it to heaven. For us the ladder of the law has fallen and become a railroad track of joyful obedience. It is not on us any more as a deathly burden; we are on it. What has happened? The answer is given in Galatians 5:18,

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The Spirit so transforms our life as we trust the promises of God (Gal. 3:5), that we love what God loves and hate what God hates. And so his law is no longer a burden but a mountain railroad of joy.

My prayer is that many of us would learn how to rest in the Pullman car of grace and delight ourselves in the Lord's itinerary.

PART TWO:
THE MANDATE OF WORLD MISSION

CHAPTER SIX:

**OTHER SHEEP THAT ARE NOT OF THIS FOLD
“DON’T WASTE YOUR LIFE” COLLEGE EVENT
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA
JOHN PIPER
MARCH 30, 2008**

One of the most moving books I have read about the history of modern missions is *The St. Andrews Seven* by Stuart Piggin and John Roxborough (Banner of Truth, 1985). It tells the story of how the life and teaching of Thomas Chalmers at the University of St. Andrews inspired six of his best students in the 1820’s to radical missionary commitment which resulted in 141 years of combined service on the mission field.

One of the most brilliant of these young students died while he was still 18. Already his memoirs filled two volumes. He said in one of his addresses to the mission society at the university:

We know of no office in the Church of God where the very highest mental attainments can be more beneficially employed, than in the office, all despised as it is, of the Christian missionary. (p.53)

The reason I mention this book is that it illustrates historically what I am trying to bear witness to in my life and church, namely, that a vision and zeal for missions can and should flow down from a vision of the greatness of God and his grand design for the world.

That group of students was part of the second generation of modern missions. The same thing is illustrated from the first generation, too. Let me illustrate this from the life of William Carey, the father of modern missions who gave 40 years of his life in India and who never went home on furlough. (Taken from p. 13 of *A Vision for Missions* by Tom Wells, Banner of Truth, 1985.)

In 1797, four years after he came to India, Carey tells us of being con-

fronted by a Brahman. Carey had preached on Acts 14:16 and 17:30 and said that God formerly allowed all men everywhere to go their own way, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent. The Brahman responded, “Indeed I think God ought to repent for not sending the gospel sooner to us.”

Here is a crucial need for deep Biblical doctrine. It is not an easy objection to answer. Listen to the kind of answer Carey gave and see if you would have thought of such a thing.

To this I added, suppose a kingdom had been long overrun by the enemies of its true king, and he though possessed of sufficient power to conquer them, should yet suffer them to prevail, and establish themselves as much as they could desire, would not the valor and wisdom of that king be far more conspicuous in exterminating them, than it would have been if he had opposed them at first, and prevented their entering the country? Thus by the diffusion of gospel light, the wisdom, power, and grace of God will be more conspicuous in overcoming such deep-rooted idolatries, and in destroying all that darkness and vice which have so universally prevailed in this country, than they would have been if all had not been suffered to walk in their own ways for so many ages past.

What an answer! The sovereign God rules the nations in such a way that even the ages of unbelief will redound to his glory in the most pagan of countries when the gospel victory comes! Carey did not say that God was unable to get the gospel to India sooner simply because of his stubborn and disobedient people. He knew that such impotence is simply not worthy of the name of God.

So the modern missionary movement got its start in an atmosphere of strong doctrinal commitments. They were the commitments of the great American pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards wrote *The Life of David Brainerd*, the young New England missionary—a biography that deeply influenced Carey. And on the boat to India, Carey said he com-

forted his mind by reading sermons of Jonathan Edwards who had died forty years earlier. For example: June 24, 1793,

Saw a number of flying-fish. Have begun to write Bengali,
and read Edwards' sermons and Cowper's poems. Mind
tranquil and serene...

The keynote of Edwards' and Carey's theology was the centrality of God and the glory of his sovereign grace. The origin of modern missions sprang up among pastors in England who were decidedly doctrinal in their life and preaching. Andrew Fuller, Samuel Pearce, John Sutcliffe and William Carey were all of this sort. This was the little band of brothers from which such amazing things sprung in the beginning of the modern missionary movement in the late 1700's.

Their majestic view of God moved them to lay claim to the nations on behalf of the risen Christ who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to me. Therefore, go make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28:18–19). The modern missionary movement was born in this majestic view of the sovereignty of God and the global authority of Jesus Christ.

Later on such names as David Livingstone, Adoniram Judson, Alexander Duff, John Paton, etc., were driven by the same vision. They loved the historic doctrines of Biblical Christianity.

I love their vision of God because I have found it in Scripture and this God is magnificent. My aim is to show how in my own experience the majesty and the glory of God and his absolute authority and power awaken and sustain a passion for world missions—the reaching of all the ethno-linguistic people-groups of the world with the good news that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has come and died in our place to remove the guilt and condemnation of sin and has risen from the dead to destroy death and secure everlasting life and joy for all who will believe on his name.

My text for this message is taken from John 10:16. Jesus says,

I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring
them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be
one flock, one shepherd.

This is the great missionary text in the Gospel of John. But in order to understand this missionary promise of Christ we have to notice at least six things in the context of John 10.

SIX OBSERVATIONS FROM CHRIST'S MISSIONARY PROMISE

1. JESUS CALLS HIMSELF A SHEPHERD.

Verse 11: "I am the good shepherd."

Verse 14: "I am the good shepherd."

The flock of God is the people of Israel. We know this because later, in verse 16, Jesus refers to other sheep that are not of this fold, namely Gentile converts. This leads to the second observation.

2. SOME SHEEP ARE CHRIST'S AND SOME ARE NOT.

Verses 3b-4: "...He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them."

Verse 14: "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me."

In other words, not all the people in the flock of Israel truly belonged to Christ. Some were his sheep; some weren't.

3. THE REASON SOME SHEEP BELONGED TO JESUS SO THAT HE COULD CALL THEM HIS OWN IS THAT GOD THE FATHER HAD GIVEN THEM TO THE SON.

Verse 29: "My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

This is Jesus' way of talking about the doctrine of election. God has chosen a people for his own. These are his sheep. He then gives them to his Son so that they can be saved by faith in him. You can see this clearly in John 17:6 where Jesus says to his Father,

I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; thine they were, and you gave them

to me, and they have kept thy word.

And you can see it in John 6:37,

All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out.

So Jesus can speak with confidence about some sheep among the flock of Israel that are definitely his, because they first belonged to the Father before they ever came to Jesus or believed on Jesus. The Father had chosen them for himself—"thine they were"—and then he had given them to the Son—"and thou hast given them to me" (see 6:39, 44, 65; 17:9, 24; 18:9).

4. SINCE JESUS KNOWS THOSE WHO ARE HIS, HE CAN CALL THEM BY NAME AND BECAUSE THEY ARE ALREADY HIS THEY FOLLOW.

Verses 3b-4: The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own he goes before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Verse 27: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

Be sure you see the thrust of these verses: being one of Christ's sheep enables you to respond to his call. It is not the other way around in these verses: responding to his call does not make you one of his sheep. If you hear and recognize his voice it is because you already are one of his sheep, chosen by the Father. You come to the Son because the Father is giving you to the Son (Jn. 6:44, 65).

That is the startling thing about this chapter. And it can be very offensive to a self-sufficient, unbelieving heart. It reveals to us the presumption of ultimate self-determination—of thinking that the final, decisive determination of our salvation lies in our own power. Listen carefully to verse 26:

You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.

The final boast of unbelief is destroyed by the doctrine of election. Those whom God chose he also gave to the Son, and those whom he gave to the

Son, the Son also called by name, and those whom he called hear his voice and believe.

5. BUT THAT IS NOT ALL THAT JESUS DOES FOR HIS SHEEP.

Verse 11: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Verses 14-15: I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

In other words, to echo the words of Paul again,

- those whom the Father has made his own, he also gave to the Son,
- and those whom he gave to the Son the Son also called,
- and those whom he called he also justified by laying down his life for the sheep.

6. ON THE BASIS OF THIS SACRIFICE JESUS GIVES ETERNAL LIFE TO HIS SHEEP AND IT CAN NEVER BE TAKEN AWAY.

Verses 27-30: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

In other words,

- Those whom the Father chose for himself he also gave to the Son,
- and those whom he gave to the Son the Son also called by name,
- and for those he called, he also laid down his life,
- and to those for whom he died he gave eternal life, and it can never be taken away.

The picture we have in John 10 is of a great shepherd who sovereignly saves his sheep.

- The Father gives them to him.

- He dies for them.
- He calls them by name.
- He gives them eternal life.
- And he keeps them safe forever.

What a great salvation we have! What a great Savior!

And now a great danger arises for us. Satan takes every great truth and throws up a plausible distortion of it. He did that in William Carey's day. Some Christians had taken this pride-shattering doctrine of salvation through sovereign grace and twisted it into an in-house, elitist doctrine for the private comfort of the chosen few with no burden to reach the nations of the world.

But God in his mercy has again and again made clear to his servants that his salvation is not the prerogative of any one group on earth.

Just when the Jewish disciples begin to feel like they are the real select heirs of Abraham, Jesus strikes in John 10:16: "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold"—among the Gentiles.

Just when the early American Puritans were settling in to their "chosen" status as the New Israel in the New England, Jesus said to John Eliot, "I have other sheep that are not of this Puritan fold—among the Algonquin Indians." And 100 years later to David Brainerd, "I have other sheep that are not of this Congregational fold— among the Susquehanna."

Just when the Particular Baptists of England were being frozen in the unbiblical ice of hyper-Calvinism, Jesus spoke to William Carey: "I have other sheep that are not of this English fold—in India."

Just when the mission agencies and churches were growing content with the coastland successes around the world, Jesus stirred up Hudson Taylor, "I have other sheep that are not of this coastal fold—in the middle of China." And to David Livingstone: "In the middle of Africa."

And just when all of western Christendom began to feel content in the 20th century that every country of the world had been penetrated with the gospel, Jesus came to Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, and said, "I have other sheep that are not of this visible world-wide fold—among the hidden tribal peoples, thousands of them with not even a portion of Scripture in their language."

John 10:16 is the great missionary text in the Gospel of John: I have other sheep that are not of this fold! Every time we start to get comfortable with just us, it is like a thorn in the cushion on the pew. Every time a board of world missions begins to get comfortable with the ten or eleven fields where we are planting churches, John 10:16 is like a bugle call: I have other sheep in thousands of peoples yet unreached by the gospel.

But this verse is far more than a mere goad. It is full of hope and power. It is a deep and broad foundation for great mission efforts. So I want to look at four things in John 10:16 that should fill us to overflowing with confidence in our missions dreaming and planning and labor.

FOUR REASONS WE SHOULD DO MISSIONS CONFIDENTLY

1. CHRIST HAS PEOPLE BESIDES THOSE ALREADY CONVERTED— OTHER PEOPLE BESIDES US.

“I have other sheep that are not of this fold.” In that context he meant the nations beyond Israel. By implication it means today Christ has a people beyond the church. They belong to his Father. There will always be people who argue that the doctrine of election and predestination makes missions pointless. But they are always wrong. It does not make missions pointless; it makes missions possible.

I remember John Alexander, a former president of Inter-Varsity, saying in a Q&A at Urbana 67,

At the beginning of my missionary career I said that if predestination were true I could not be a missionary. Now after 20 years of struggling with the hardness of the human heart, I say I could never be a missionary unless I believed in the doctrine of predestination.

It gives hope that Christ most certainly has a people among the nations. “I have other sheep.”

It was precisely this truth that encouraged the apostle Paul when he was downcast in Corinth.

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city.” (Acts 18:9-10)

“I have other sheep that are not of this fold.” It is a promise full of hope for those who dream about new fields of missionary labor.

2. THE VERSE IMPLIES THAT THE “OTHER SHEEP” THAT CHRIST HAS ARE SCATTERED OUTSIDE THE PRESENT FOLD.

This is made explicit in John 11:51-52, where John explains a word of prophecy spoken by Caiaphas, the high priest.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

World evangelization, for the apostle John, is the ingathering of the children of God—those sheep that God has chosen and intends to give to the Son. And the point for our encouragement in missionary strategy is that they are scattered. They are not all pocketed in one or two places. They are scattered everywhere. The way John put it when he wrote the book of Revelation was this:

You were slain and by your blood you ransomed men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.
(5:9)

This is why all the talk in our day about reaching unreached people groups seems to me to be totally Biblical. So we may be sure on the authority of God’s word that among all the peoples of the world we will find those who belong to the Father. This is a great encouragement to get on with the task of frontier missions and to reach all the unreached peoples of the world.

3. THE LORD HAS COMMITTED HIMSELF TO BRING HIS LOST SHEEP HOME.

He promises to do it. “I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also.” He will bring them.

This does not mean, as some of the hyper-Calvinists thought it did in Carey’s day, that Christ will gather in his sheep without sending us to call them! In John 17:18 Jesus says,

As the Father has sent me, even so send I you.

We continue the mission of Christ. So Jesus prays in John 17:20,

I do not pray for these [his disciples] only but also for those who believe in me through their word.

In other words, just as Jesus called his sheep with his own lips in Palestine, so he still calls them today with our lips, and they hear his voice and follow him (cf. 1 Jn 4:6). He does it. But not without us!

This is the wonder of the gospel. When it is preached truthfully in the power of the Spirit it is not merely the word of man. It is the word of God! (1 Thess. 2:13).

In other words, even today it is just as true as it was in Jesus day: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (Jn 10:27). It is Christ who calls in the gospel. Christ gathers. “I will build my church!” (Matt. 16:18). We are only ambassadors speaking in his stead. That is why Paul said in Romans 15:18,

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles.

So we can take heart: all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to the Son of God (Matt. 28:18) and he declares, “I must bring in my other sheep.” He will do it.

Which implies the final word of hope from the text.

4. IF HE BRINGS THEM *THEY WILL COME!*

“I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice” (John 10:16).

None of Christ’s sheep finally reject his word. And none believe without it! What else can keep you going in a hard and unresponsive place of ministry except the confidence that God reigns and that those whom the Father has chosen will heed the voice of the Son?

I close with a story about Peter Cameron Scott who was born in 1867 and founded the African Inland Mission. He had tried to serve in Africa but had to come home because he contracted malaria. The second attempt was especially joyful because he was joined by his brother John. But the joy evaporated as John fell victim to the fever. Scott buried his brother all by himself, and at the grave rededicated himself to preach the gospel. But again his health broke and he had to return to England utterly discouraged.

But in London something wonderful happened. We read about it in Ruth Tucker’s *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Zondervan 1983)—a book that I hope all of you will read.

He needed a fresh source of inspiration and he found it at a tomb in Westminster Abbey that held the remains of a man who had inspired so many other in their missionary service to Africa. The spirit of David Livingstone seemed to be prodding Scott onward as he knelt reverently and read the inscription,

Other sheep I have which are not of this fold;
Them also I must bring.

He would return to Africa and lay down his life, if need be, for the cause for which this great man had lived and died. (301)

My prayer for you is that God might deepen and broaden the Biblical

foundation of your vision for the world. May he open our eyes, not only to the fields that are white to harvest, but also to the majesty and splendor and glory of his sovereign grace.

And may we be carried over all the obstacles and discouragements by the great confidence that the Lord himself will gather the ransomed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also. They will hear my voice!” And when all have heard and believed the end will come. And the kingdoms of this earth shall be the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ. Don’t waste your life. Open your mouth and become the voice of the Sovereign Shepherd.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE UNFATHOMABLE RICHES OF CHRIST, FOR ALL PEOPLES, ABOVE ALL POWERS, THROUGH THE CHURCH

JOHN PIPER

OCTOBER 24, 2004

Ephesians 3:1–13

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

From the above text we are going to focus on Ephesians 3:8-10. And we are going to move backward through this text, passing from the widest view to the most narrow view, or from the biggest picture of things to the smallest, or from the greatest goal of missions backward through three successively smaller means to reach this great goal.

FOUR STEPS

So we will move in four steps: first, from the display of the wisdom of God to the innumerable angelic armies (v. 10); second, to the means that God uses to display this wisdom, namely, the church, the gathering of the people of God from all the nations of the world (v. 10a); third, to the means of this gathering, namely, the preaching of the of the unsearchable riches of Christ among all the nations (v. 9); and, finally, to the means of this preaching, namely, you and me, the least of the saints (v. 8).

So we move from the display of God's great wisdom to the world of angels, to the church gathered from all the nations; to the preaching of the gospel of the riches of Christ to the simple, sinner-saints, who live and minister by grace alone—the missionaries.

I go backward in this order because I want to end with you. God is not done with the work of missions. He said go make disciples of all nations. And then he said, "I will be with you to the end of the age." The promise is good till Jesus comes, because the commission is binding till Jesus comes. Therefore you and I face the question individually what our role is in obeying the great commission to reach all the unreached peoples of the world with the gospel of the riches of Christ.

That is where I will end this morning, Lord willing. My aim is to awaken and confirm and encourage a sense of God's leading in your life toward cross-cultural missions. And so at the end of this service I will invite you to come to the front so that I can pray for you and so that you can receive a card from the Missions Department here for your support and encouragement and guidance. I don't want you to be taken off guard at the end. I want your decision to come to be prayerful and thoughtful. So let's pray now that God would be at work to awaken and confirm and encourage your own sense of his leading in your life.

A PICTURE OF THESE FOUR STEPS

Now I want to create a picture for you of these four steps. Remember we are going to move backward through the text from the display of God's manifold wisdom (v. 10b), to the gathering of God's global church (v. 10a), to the preaching of Christ's unsearchable riches (v. 8b), to the service of God's ordinary missionary (v. 8a).

Picture in your mind a great, wise painter, painting on a huge canvas with many brushes, most of them very ordinary and messy. The painter is God, so you can't picture him. He's invisible. But he intends for his painting to be the visible display of his wisdom. He knows people can't see him, but he wants his wisdom to be seen and admired. His canvas is huge. It's the size of the created universe. I know you can't really imagine looking at that canvas because you are in it. But do your best. And God is painting with thousands and thousands of colors and shades and textures—a picture as big as the universe and as old as creation and as lasting as eternity—a picture we call history, with the central drama being the preparation, salvation, and formation of the church of Jesus Christ. And he is using thousands of different brushes, most of them very ordinary and very small because every minute detail is crucial in this painting, to display the wisdom of the Painter. These brushes are God's missionaries.

That's the picture. Now there's a reason in the text that I am encouraging to have a picture like this in your mind. It's in the word "manifold" in verse 10:

so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God
might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in
the heavenly places.

This Greek word for "manifold" occurs in the Bible only here. It is very unusual. Half of it (*poikilos*) is used to mean, "wrought in various colors," diversified, intricate, complex, subtle. Its basic idea is of varied in color. Then Paul puts a prefix on the word that means "many" (*polupoikilos*). So the emphasis is very many colors and variations and intricacies and subtleties. So, since that is in the text, I want you to think of the display of God's wisdom as a universe-sized painting with innumerable colors and shadings

and texture. It is unsearchably intricate.

1. THE DISPLAY OF GOD'S MANIFOLD WISDOM (V. 10B)

Now let's go to our four steps and start in verse 10 with the greatest goal of history and missions. "...so that..." You can see from the words "so that" that God's purpose and aim for missions and the church are now being expressed. The riches of Christ are preached to the Gentiles, the nations, and the church is gathered from all the peoples

so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God
might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in
the heavenly places.

So this is God's goal. He created the world, and he redeemed a people through the death of his son (see Ephesians 2:12-19), and he sends missionaries and gathers his church by the preaching of the riches of Christ

so that that through the church the manifold wisdom of
God might now be made known to the rulers and authori-
ties in the heavenly places.

That's the goal of all of history. That is the goal of missions, the central drama of history.

This universe is finally about the many-colored wisdom of God. History exists to display the infinitely varied and complex and intricate wisdom of God. Missions is the means that God uses to gather the church. And that gathering from all the nations is the focus of this wisdom-displaying painting. You see that in the words "through the church":

so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God
might now be made known.

But stay with the display of God's wisdom for a moment. The next point has to do with the church. Look who the audience is in verse 10:

so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This means that the painting, and the drama of history and redemption that it portrays, from creation to consummation, is meant to show angels—the good ones and the evil ones—the greatness of God’s wisdom.

Missions exists, and the ingathering of God’s elect exists, and the church exists so that angels would stand in awe of the wisdom of God. God displays his wisdom in history so that the worship of heaven would be white hot with admiration and wonder. The good angels never fell into sin, and only marvel at the wisdom of God’s grace from outside, so to speak. No angel will ever sing “amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” They are not wretches and have never been lost. This is our song and our joy, and they can never sing it or know it. But God wanted them to see it. And so his aim in history is to display the wisdom of his grace in the way he saves the church by justifying the ungodly from all nations by faith alone on the basis of Christ alone. And the angels love to stoop down and get as close as they can to the wonders of redemption and how God prepared and saved and gathered his church (1 Peter 1:12).

And the demons (Ephesians 6:12)—the evil principalities and powers—must look at this painting and watch the wisdom by which they were defeated in the very moment they thought they had triumphed—in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in the blood of the martyrs. Just as Revelation 2:10 says,

Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Just when God paints a dark color of the death of his witness and the devils begin to gloat, God picks up another brush and with orange and yellow and red makes that dark death serve the beauty of his wisdom. And the demons gnash their teeth.

The final glory of the painting “Missions” is that every brush stroke will add to the infinitely intricate display of God’s wisdom to the armies of heaven. So let’s turn now from the display of God’s manifold wisdom to...

2. THE GATHERING OF GOD’S GLOBAL CHURCH (V. 10A)

We have seen in verse 10 that it is through the church that the great divine Painter is displaying his manifold wisdom to the armies of heaven and hell. But now notice that the church is being gathered from all the nations. Verses 8–9,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles [there is the first pointer, the “Gentiles” are the non-Jewish nations] the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone [there it is again: we are to spread the gospel to “everyone”] what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

The “mystery hidden for ages” is exactly this universal scope of the gospel to include Gentiles and not just Jews in the covenant people of God. Verse 6 makes this crystal clear:

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

The nations share in the promise made to Abraham. They become part of the historic people of God. They become “true Jews” (Romans 2:29).

We have seen all of this in Romans 11. Wild Gentile branches are being grafted into the tree of promise, and broken-off Jewish branches will be grafted in when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. It’s the complex and strange and intricate way that God is saving his church from all the nations so that none can boast that brings Paul in Romans 11:33 to the exact place he comes in Ephesians 3:10, namely to the praise of God’s unsearchable wisdom:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

That is what God aims at in heaven and on earth—the praise of his many-colored wisdom in the way he is saving and gathering his church from all the peoples of the world. There are twists and turns in history that no one ever dreamed would bring about what God designed. There are no wasted strokes on this canvas as God paints his wisdom in the history of missions.

Which leads us now to the means of this gathering. How does missions advance? How is the church gathered from the nations to the praise of God's many-colored wisdom?

3. THE PREACHING OF CHRIST'S UNSEARCHABLE RICHES (V. 8B)

In Ephesians 3:8–9, Paul writes,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

Missions happens by preaching to the nations “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Missionaries lift up Jesus Christ and all that God is for us in him, and God gathers his elect from all the peoples of the world.

That term “the unsearchable riches of Christ” is worth a year of sermons. But I give you one pointer to what it means. In Ephesians 2:12 Paul tells the Gentiles—the converts from the nations—

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

In other words, once, all that God had ever promised in the Old Testament for the glorious future of his people was not theirs. They were excluded from everything God promised. Now verse 19 is the gospel message based on the cross of Christ:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

That is what missionaries preach everywhere they go: you—you Uzbeks, you Maninka, you Kachin, you Shandai, you Swedes, you Germans, you Russians, you British—you who trust Christ are now part of the covenant made with Israel. You are fellow citizens. You are members of the household of God. You will inherit every promise ever made if you believe in Christ. All of them are yes to you in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). You will inherit the earth. You are heir of the world. You are children of the maker of the universe in Jesus Christ. All things are yours. And Jesus Christ is the sum of all those things, and all things will show you more of him and increase your joy forever.

Ephesians 2:7 says that it is going to take eternity for God to exhaust on you the unsearchable riches of his glory in Christ Jesus:

so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

It will take ages upon ages upon ages for the riches of Christ to be searched out.

That is what missionaries say to the nations of the world and show them—that Christ died and rose again so that people from every nation might be one in this inheritance.

Which leaves just one final question: Who are the brushes? If God aims to display his many-colored wisdom with the canvas of world history, and if the in-gathering church from every people and tribe and nation is the main drama on this canvas, and if missions is the means of gathering and

establishing that church among all the peoples, who are the brushes God uses to paint this drama?

4. THE SERVICE OF GOD'S ORDINARY MISSIONARIES (V. 8A)

The brushes he uses are messy, ordinary people who have seen the unsearchable riches of Christ and are willing, and often eager, to take these riches to the nations. The brushes are broken, sinning, ordinary missionaries—of whom the world is not worthy (Hebrews 11:38).

Verse 8 reads:

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

There are two reasons Paul mentioned that he was the least of all the saints. One is because he was a hater and persecutor of the church and of Christ. He never got over that God had chosen him in spite of his horrible past. The other reason is to remind you today that he can do the same for you.

So here is one of the greatest incentives of all to draw you into missions. God intends to use ordinary, messy, small paint brushes on the canvass of the history of missions because every minute stroke of his brush matters. Every bright stroke of triumph and every dark stroke of suffering matters. He is an infinitely wise painter. He knows what he is doing with your life. Not one stroke will be wasted. You can trust him with your life. Yield to the wise hand that would paint with your life.

Oh, what riches we have to give!

So I want to invite you to come. And I want those of you who do not come to feel good about not coming because of how committed you are—for now—to sending those who come. This is a partnership. Sitting is an obedience. And coming is an obedience. If God has been at work in your life to stir you to look seriously toward cross-cultural missions in your life—short-term, mid-term, or long-term—I would like you to come. I would like to pray for you and give you a card for your encouragement and support. Why don't you who are already missionaries and already committed to going join the rest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE AROMA OF CHRIST AMONG THE NATIONS

JOHN PIPER

OCTOBER 29, 2006

2 Corinthians 2:12–17

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Today is the second Sunday of our Fall Missions Focus. It has been our pattern for many years to close this service with a call to come to the front of the sanctuary for everyone who believes God is stirring in your life to move you sooner or later toward cross-cultural missions longer-term. So please pray with me that God would confirm in this service what he has been doing in your life, or may begin to do today.

THE APOSTLE PAUL: FRONTIER MISSIONARY

Before we turn to the text from 2 Corinthians let me put it in a missionary context. The apostle Paul was a missionary. We have seen that with

crystal clarity in Romans 15:20 where he said that his ambition—his holy ambition—was:

to preach the gospel not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.

He was called to the frontiers, where the church was not yet established. We call this frontier missions, or pioneer missions, or missions to unreached people groups. Paul was the first and probably the greatest. But Oh what a lineage of lovers followed in his train! Right down to this day and this church and this service.

You can state the reason for this two-thousand-year lineage of missionaries in lots of different ways.

The last thing Jesus said to us in Matthew 28:18–20 before he went back to heaven was:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

He has all authority over the souls of all people and nations, he promises to be with us to help us, and he commands us to go. That is valid today because the end of the age has not come.

Or you can give the reason for missions like this:

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:2-3)

God created the world to display and magnify his glory. People who don't believe don't magnify the glory of his grace. We want them to. We want the earth to be filled with the (acknowledged!) glory of the Lord like the waters cover the sea.

Or you can give the reason for missions like this:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The love of God extends salvation to all. Everyone who believes on Jesus has eternal life with Jesus, and everyone who doesn't perishes. Missions is the answer of our heart to that love.

Or you can give the reason for missions like this: According to the rigorous statistical efforts of the Joshua Project, there are 15,988 distinct ethno-linguistic peoples in the world. Of these, they count 6,572 as unreached, that is, fewer than two percent of them are Christians. Two point six billion people live in those unreached people groups. Just to give you a flavor: Of the 100 largest unreached people groups, 44 are in India, 8 are in China, and 7 are in Indonesia and Pakistan. The three largest are the Japanese in Japan, the Bengali in Bangladesh, and the Shaikh in India. Of these 100 largest unreached peoples, 43 are Muslim, 36 are Hindu, and 9 are Buddhist. Twenty-two of them have populations over 20 million. In other words, there is a great work to be done in obedience to Jesus. And Jesus has all authority to get it done.

One of the great longings of my life is that we at Bethlehem would be the sending base of ever-increasing numbers of missionaries to the unreached peoples and that we would send them with ever-increasing effectiveness and ever-increasing biblical-faithfulness and ever-increasing care for them and their families. When I think about not wasting my life, this is what I think about as often as anything: study and pray and write and speak and lead in a way that results in more and more visionary young people and restless mid-career people and wise, mature retired people who pull up their stakes, pack their tents and go with Jesus and the gospel to unreached peoples of the world, no matter where they are—far or near.

GOD USES HIS WORD IN THE MISSIONARY CALL

So with passion in mind, and praying as we go, let's look at one missionary's testimony about what it means. Keep in mind that God often—very often—uses his word to awaken and confirm his calling to the work of missions. May that happen now, as I simply unfold 2 Corinthians 2:12-17.

The situation behind this text is that Paul wrote a painful letter to Corinth and is anxious about whether he had alienated them or healed them. So he sent Titus to Corinth to find out how they were doing. It may help to have the geography clear: Corinth is in the southern tip of Greece. If you go up the east coast, you come to the northern part of the peninsula called Macedonia where Thessalonica and Philippi are. Just to the east across the Aegean sea that separates Greece and Turkey today was Troas.

LEAVING AN OPEN DOOR TO FOLLOW A RESTLESS SPIRIT

This is where we pick up the story in verses 12-13:

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

So, even though there was an open door for the gospel in Troas his heart was so troubled by the situation in Corinth that he decided not to stay but to keep moving to where he might meet Titus on the way back from Corinth.

I'm not going to linger here, but this is very striking and may relate to where you are in your life. A door is wide open where you are. Much needs to be done—right where you are. But your spirit cannot rest. So it was with Paul. And amazingly he left the open door of Troas behind and followed his restless spirit. Should he have left Troas? Should you? He did. And because he did, we have this amazing portion of scripture.

PAUL WAS CONQUERED IN CHRIST

So now Paul is in Macedonia and at last Titus comes. He doesn't say that here. But he does in chapter 7 (vv. 5-7):

For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was

comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.

That is what's behind chapter 2. But here in chapter 2, Paul exults in a very different way over this news. He chooses two metaphors or word pictures that are shocking. First, he says in verse 14,

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

This doesn't mean what you probably think it means. The word translated "lead in triumphal procession" (*thriambeuonti*) refers to what a great Roman general does when he leads in captivity those enemies he has conquered and takes them to their death or to slavery.

The word is used one other place in the New Testament. You can see this meaning in Colossians 2:15:

[God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over (*thriambeusas*) them in him.

So in Colossians, Paul says God leads the devil in triumph, and in 2 Corinthians, he says that God leads Paul in triumph. Both have been defeated in their rebellion against God. Both are being led in triumphal procession and shamed for their rebellion. But the great difference is that Paul is "in Christ" and Satan is not. Verse 14 again:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

In other words, Paul was defeated and taken captive; but he was brought to faith and forgiven and justified and made a glad and willing servant of the greatest General who ever was. Paul was "in Christ" and that makes all the difference.

A PICTURE ACCOMPLISHING TWO PURPOSES

So why does he use this word picture? Because he wants to accomplish two almost opposite things at the same time. On the one hand, God is triumphant and Paul is in his service. But on the other hand, God is like a great general and Paul is conquered and called to suffer in his service—even die. That's what this word picture accomplishes.

On the one hand, Paul wants to rejoice and thank God that the Corinthians have repented and that his painful letter did not alienate them but blessed them. That's a triumph worth exulting over with a triumphal procession.

But on the other hand, he knows that there are many adversaries in Corinth who do not accept his authority as an apostle and who have preached a different gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4). He calls them “super-apostles” in 11:5 and 12:11. They don't recognize Paul's authority, and they don't see Christ in his ministry. In other words, Paul knows that he is not triumphant as a missionary the way some think he should be. Some people are converted. And some are not. Some see Christ in him and some don't. They only see weakness. He has some success and some failure. So he chooses a word picture that describes him both as belonging to a great victor, and as a conquered enemy whose service of the king is to suffer and look weak and even die for him—led in triumphal procession as a defeated foe in the service of the king.

A SECOND PICTURE

That's the first picture. The second picture is of his life as a sacrificial offering that has a sweet fragrance before God. This picture starts in the middle of verse 14:

...and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge
of him everywhere.

So Paul pictures his missionary life and ministry as spreading a fragrance of the knowledge of Christ. And the reason I say it is a picture of a sacrifice being offered to God is that in verse 15 he says that the aroma is first “to God.” It is like incense being offered to God: “For we are the aroma of Christ to

God” (v. 15a). Not first to the world, but to God.

Ephesians 5:2 gives the best explanation of this picture:

Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So when Christ died for sinners, it was like a fragrant offering that was very pleasing to God. Now here is Paul standing in the place of Christ as a missionary and suffering like Christ in the service of his conquering Lord, and he says, “We are the aroma of Christ to God.” In other words, when we suffer as missionaries in the service of Christ, it’s like Christ suffering for the lost, and God smells this fragrance of sacrificial love and it pleases him. That’s the picture so far. But then comes the heart-rejoicing and heart-breaking parts of missionary service. This aroma of the love of Christ in the sacrificial service of the missionary may please God, but it does not please everybody. This aroma divides the world. Look at this division in verses 15-16,

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

THE HEART-BREAKING SIDE OF MISSIONS

In other words, some people smell the sacrificial love of Christ in the life of a missionary and it only smells like death. They hear the gospel and all they hear is death. They look at the cross and all they see is death. They see no life. No hope. No future. No joy. And so they turn away. And if they turn away forever, they die. They are the perishing. The smell of death leads to death. That’s the heart-breaking side of missions. They are people who don’t believe. They don’t see Christ as precious. They don’t see his suffering as a treasure. They don’t smell his death for sinners as the sweetest fragrance in the universe. It’s not a satisfying fragrance. It’s simply the smell of death.

THE HEART-REJOICING SIDE OF MISSIONS

But there is the heart-rejoicing side of missions. Verse 16:

...to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

Those who are being saved smell the death of Christ as the aroma of life. They see in his death the substitute that they so desperately need before God. The Son of God dying in their place is the fragrance of life. So they don't turn away. They believe him and receive him and embrace him and treasure him and they live—forever. Smelling Christ as the aroma of life gives life.

Those are Paul's two pictures of his life as a missionary. First, God conquered him when he was his enemy. He is now leading Paul both in triumph and in suffering. There is reason to exult in this procession. And there is reason to groan in this procession. Paul's calling is to show the sufferings of Christ to the world in his own suffering. Second, the other picture is of Christ as a sweet-smelling sacrifice or incense to God, and Paul sharing in Christ's mission and sufferings so that he becomes this very fragrance in the world—which some smell as life and live, but others smell as death and die.

WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?

Now Paul asks at the end of verse 16—and I make it our closing question—“Who is sufficient for these things?” Who can bear the weight of knowing that the aroma of your Christ-exalting life will lead some to eternal life and others to eternal death? It's as serious as if you walked down a busy city street at lunch hour and some would smile and come in behind you and be saved, and everyone else would drop dead. Who could bear it? That's what Paul asks.

In one sense, the answer is no one. But that's not Paul's main point. He said in 2 Corinthians 1:12 and Romans 1:5 that he carries out this very ministry by the grace of God. He is not sufficient—you and I are not sufficient—in ourselves. No missionary feels sufficient. But 2 Corinthians 3:5 says, “Our sufficiency is from God.”

So the utterly crucial question for many of you, as you have prayed and

thought about giving your life, or a substantial part of it, to missions, is: Can I do this? Can I bear this weight of being the aroma of Christ in some new place? By God's grace, you can.

FIVE TESTS

Paul gives us five tests in verse 17 to help us know the answer to these questions. I will turn them into questions for you to answer:

First, do you treasure Christ enough so that you do not peddle his word? Paul says, "For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word." That is, these peddlers don't love Christ. They love money and use Christ. So the first test is: Do you love Christ more than money?

Strictly, the next four phrases in verse 17 all modify the word speak. Literally: we speak from sincerity, from God, before God, and in Christ. So I ask you:

Second, will you speak from sincerity? Will you be real? Will you mean what you say? Will you renounce all pretense and hypocrisy?

Third, will you speak as from God? That is, will you take not only your commission from God, but your words and your authority from God? Will you speak his words and not your own? Will you speak in his authority and not your own? Will you draw your strength and guidance from his power and wisdom, not your own?

Fourth, will you speak as before God? That is, will you reckon him to be your judge and no man? Will you care more about his assessment of your words and not be deterred by human criticism?

And, fifth, will you speak as in Christ? That is, will you get your identity and your assurance and your confidence and your hope and your courage from your union with Christ?

NO PERFECT MISSIONARIES

There are no perfect missionaries. The answer to these questions should be: Oh yes, Lord, as much as I know my heart, that is what I intend to be. Help me. To love you more than money. To be real and sincere. To speak your word. To fear no man. To get all I need from Christ.

In a moment, I would like to invite all of you who believe that God is moving you toward cross-cultural missionary work sooner or later longer-term (not just a few weeks but for some years), to come to the front and let us pray for you. And if you want to move forward with the Nurture Program for missionary training, we will give you a card to fill out so that our mission leaders can be in touch with you and serve you in whatever way will help you. I am thinking of children who are old enough to have thought this through and young people and young adults, men and women, married or single, mid-lifers and retirees. God has his ways to loosen your roots. If you can discern what he is doing, I hope you will come.

CHAPTER NINE

GOSPEL TO THE NATIONS, GENEROSITY TO THE POOR OCTOBER 23, 2005

Galatians 2:1–10

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Today is the second Sunday of our Fall Missions Focus. It has been our pattern for many years to close this service with a call for everyone to come to the front of the sanctuary who believes God is stirring in your life to move you sooner or later toward cross-cultural missions longer-term. So please pray with me that God would confirm in this service what he has been doing in your life, or may begin to do today.

The first thing I want to do is walk you from Galatians 1:6 to 2:10 so that you can see the flow of Paul's thought. Then we will work our way backwards and focus on three things: the poor, the gospel, and the call—finally, your call. Seek to hear it as I preach.

PAUL'S GOSPEL IS FROM CHRIST, NOT MAN

Paul is astonished. The Galatians are about to abandon the gospel because some professing Christians had come among them preaching the necessity of circumcision for salvation. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone on the basis of Christ alone was at stake, and Paul can hardly believe what he is hearing. Verse 6:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Then he tells them there is no other gospel that can save anyone from sin and hell, and if anyone tells you there is...well, listen to his words in verse 9:

As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

In street language, but very literally: To hell with him.

Then he argues that his gospel is truly from Jesus Christ, not from any man or from his own head. Verses 11–12,

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not

receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Then he defends this amazing claim by reminding them how incredibly his life had changed. In verses 13-14 he reminds them what a zealous persecutor of the church he was. Then in verses 15-17 he describes the change in his life and that it came without going to Jerusalem:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Then (verse 18) after three years he made a 15-day trip to Jerusalem and met Peter and James the Lord's brother; then he disappears for 14 years into Syria and Cilicia.

The point of all that was to say: My gospel is from Christ and not from man. I am not a secondhand apostle. My authority and my message are not derivative. They come from the risen Christ, not Peter and James.

But now in chapter two he continues this emphasis but adds an emphasis on unity with the original twelve apostles. Paul knows that if his gospel and his apostleship are rejected by the original twelve apostles, there would be an intolerable split in the foundation of Christ's church and he would be running in vain. So he must establish his independence and his unity with the original apostles. That is the point of 2:1-10.

VERSES 1-2

Then after fourteen years [a long time to establish his independence] I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me [taking Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile convert right into the hotbed of Jewish legal conservatism as a test case of his gospel of freedom]. I went

up because of a revelation [Christ told him to go, this is not a human strategy] and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

VERSES 3-5

Things got very tense for a while as the circumcision party—he calls them false brothers!—tries to force the issue of the necessity of circumcision. But Paul does not budge because the gospel was at stake. This is the “other gospel” that he called damnable in chapter 1 verse 8.

But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

VERSES 6-9

These four verses represent one of the most important moments in history—all of history! Unity is reached among the founding apostles of the Christian Church, and the gospel is safeguarded from one of its earliest threats. I think it would be fair to say that for the first and greatest missionary to the Gentiles the most essential thing in missions was to get the gospel right—exactly right. Otherwise he would be running in vain.

And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me [He continues to stress his independence. His gospel is from Christ, not man]. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to

the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

VERSE 10

Then, finally, Paul adds verse 10. There is one other thing we agreed on:

Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing
I was eager to do.

Paul agreed with the apostles that concrete financial compassion for the poor was a crucial part of apostolic ministry.

Now let's turn around and go backward through this text and this time only focus on three things: the poor, the gospel and the call, and end with your call. Pray that God would make it plain as I preach.

POOR

First, the poor. What I want us to see is four things: That the apostles were of one mind about this, that it was important enough to mention alongside the purity of the gospel, that Paul was not just willing to do it but eager to do it, and finally, that the passion and this priority for the poor came from Christ himself. The first three are crystal clear from verse 10:

Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing
I was eager to do.

They are agreed. They mention it explicitly along with the gospel they share. And the eagerness of Paul is made clear. "The very thing I was eager to do." Not a burden but a blessing. I love to bless the poor.

But where did this passion and this priority come from? For Paul I think we should say it flowed out of the heart that the gospel created

(2 Cor. 8:9). A forgiven heart is a compassionate heart. But for the original twelve apostles, they have not only the new heart of compassion, but also memories of the way Jesus himself lived.

- The vision of the judgment in Matthew 25:35–36 where Jesus says,

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

- Zachaeus gives half of his possessions to the poor, and Jesus says,

Today salvation has come to this house (Luke 19:9).

The evidence of salvation is practical, financial compassion for the poor.

- Jesus' words to the man who invited him to a feast,

When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:13-14).

- And inauguration of Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:18,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

And so many more places could be cited. The point is: the apostles were agreed on the importance of ministry to the poor because it flows from the center of the gospel—the cross—and because Jesus lived it out. The apostles were eager to bless the poor. It was part of their foundational ministry. I assume therefore it should be a crucial commitment in the church today—in missions and in the ongoing ministry of the church.

And it isn't just the Christian poor. Galatians 6:10 says,

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Yes, take care of your own. But the heart of Christ does not neglect unbelievers. Paul said in Romans 12:20,

If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

Christians who have the heart of Christ and who follow in the paths of the apostles remember the poor, to do as much good for them as we can.

GOSPEL

Then we take our second step backward through the text to the centrality and purity of the gospel in verse 5:

To them [those who were insisting on circumcision for salvation] we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

How attractive it may seem at times—especially in missions—to alter the gospel and make it fit the situation so as not to offend anyone. But Paul doesn't do that. The Jewish Christian cultural and religious expectation of many was that circumcision was necessary. Can't Paul concede that for the sake of peace? And not only did Paul refuse to submit "even for a moment," he says, but he even called them "false brothers" (in verse 4). This is really strong. One slight adjustment to justification by faith alone, and Paul calls the change damnable in Galatians 1:8 and calls the people false brothers.

So the point is: What gospel our missionaries take to the nations is really important. Let our missionaries be utterly clear about what the gospel is! Let none of them say that doctrine doesn't matter. Let none say that small changes to the gospel can't hurt anybody. May every missionary under pres-

sure to compromise the gospel say with the apostle Paul, “We did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” This is tough love at home for the sake of the nations.

And that includes the poor. May every missionary to the poor say with Jesus and the apostle Paul, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18)—the real good news of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of Christ’s blood and righteousness alone, to the glory of God alone—the good news worth dying for.

CALL

Finally, take a third step backward in the text to look at Paul’s call—and ponder your own. The great gospel promise and hope is Romans 10:13,

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

That is true in a jail at midnight in Philippi where a Gentile jailer listens to two Jews singing in their chains. It’s true in the inner city projects of Bangkok. It’s true in the rubble of Pakistani mountains and Guatemalan villages. It’s true among Somali refugees in Minneapolis. It’s true in Mexico and Kazakhstan and Kenya and Cameroon and Russia and Papua New Guinea and the Philippines and Senegal and Japan and Bosnia and Germany and Ethiopia and Peru and Bolivia and Ecuador and Brazil and the Czech Republic and Austria and Syria and the Ivory Coast and Turkey and China and Oman and the United Arab Emirates and England and Uzbekistan and Indonesia and India and Zambia. The gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God saves all who call upon him in truth.

“But,” Paul asks in Romans 10:14f,

how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

This is what God did for Paul. He called him and sent him. And this is what God does today. God sends people. He does it in a thousand ways. It is amazing how he does it. He is doing it now, I believe, in this room. Just awakening it for some. Bringing others to deep conviction.

Look at what happened to Paul in Galatians 1:15-16:

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...

Notice how Paul says it: God revealed his Son to me, in order that I might preach him. The way Paul met Jesus and knew Jesus became his call to be a missionary. God revealed his Son to me and the effect was: I became a missionary. I crossed the cultures from Pharisaic Judaism to all the forms of Gentile uncleanness in the Roman world.

I don't know how God is doing it with you. He has his ways of stirring us to the point where we know we must move. We must venture. We must go toward the unreached and toward the poor. And you know that these are almost the same now. Eighty-five percent of the poorest of the poor live in the 10/40 Window (from West Africa to the Pacific Rim 10 degrees North to 40 degrees North). And 95% of the least reached peoples live in the 10/40 Window. In other words, globally speaking, the most unreached peoples and the poorest peoples are almost the same.

A call to the unreached peoples is almost the same as a call to the poorest of the poor. Oh, that God might raise up more and more from among us to go!

In a moment I would like to invite all of you who believe that God is moving you toward cross-cultural missionary work sooner or later longer-term (not just a few weeks but for some years), to come to the front and let me pray for you and give you a card to fill out so that our mission leaders can be in touch with you and serve you in whatever way will help you. I am thinking of children who are old enough to have thought this through and young people and young adults married or single, mid-lifers and retirees. God has his ways to loosen your roots. If you can discern what he is doing,

I hope you will come.

It will mean a love for the poor and trust in the gospel and a sense of God leading and God's provision. To stay in your seat I hope means: I re-dedicate myself to be a good sender, a good rope holder. Let's pray.

PART THREE:
THE COSTS AND BLESSINGS OF MISSION

CHAPTER TEN

DOING MISSIONS WHEN DYING IS GAIN
WHEATON COLLEGE
JOHN PIPER
OCTOBER 27, 1996

My mission statement in life and my church's mission statement is,

We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

I love that mission statement for a lot of reasons. One is because I know it cannot fail. I know it cannot fail because it's a promise. Matthew 24:14,

This gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

(And I hope that you know that "nations" doesn't mean political states. It means something like people groups, ethnic-linguistic groupings.) We may be absolutely certain that every one of them will be penetrated by the gospel to the degree that you can say that a witness, an understandable self-propagating witness, is there.

Now let me give you some reasons why we can bank on that.

THE PROMISE IS SURE

The promise is sure for several reasons.

1. Jesus never lies. It was Jesus who said Matthew 24:14, not me.

Heaven and earth may pass away, but my word will never pass away.

So this mission that we're on together is going to finish. It's going to be done, and you can either get on board and enjoy the triumph or you can cop-out and waste your life. You have only those two choices, because there is no middle option like, "Maybe it won't happen, and I can be on the best side by not jumping on board." That won't happen.

2. The ransom has already been paid for those people among all the nations. According to Revelation 5:9-10,

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

They're paid for, and God will not go back on his Son's payment.

I love the story of the Moravians. In northern Germany two of them were getting on a boat, ready to sell themselves into slavery in the West Indies, never to come back again. And as the boat drifts out into the harbor they lift their hands and say, "May the Lamb receive the reward of his suffering." What they meant was that Christ had already bought those people. And they were going to find them by indiscriminately preaching the gospel, through which the Holy Spirit would call them to himself.

So I know this can't abort, because the debt has been paid for each of God's people everywhere in the world. Those lost sheep, as Jesus called them, that are scattered throughout the world will come in as the Father calls them through the preaching of the gospel.

3. The glory of God is at stake.

Christ became a servant to the circumcised in order to confirm the truthfulness of God, so that he might make strong [or sure or reliable] the promises made to the patriarchs, and in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy. (Rom. 15:8-9)

The whole purpose of the Incarnation was to bring glory to the Father through the manifestation of his mercy to the nations.

The glory of God is at stake in the Great Commission. Back in 1983 at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Tom Steller—my sidekick now of 17 years—and I were both met by God in amazing ways. Tom, in the middle of the night, couldn't sleep, so he got up, put on a John Michael Talbot song, laid down on the couch, and he heard our theology translated into missions. (We are a God-glory oriented people, but we had not yet made sense of missions like we ought.) John Michael Talbot was singing about the glory of God filling the earth the way the waters cover the sea, and Tom wept for an hour. At the same time God was moving in on me and Noël to ask, "What can we do to make this place a launching pad for missions?" And everything came together to make an electric moment in the life of our church, and it all flowed from a passion for the glory of God.

4. God is sovereign. God is sovereign! A few weeks ago, as I'm preaching through Hebrews, we arrived at Hebrews 6. As you know, this is a very difficult text about whether these people are Christians or not when they fall away. And in verses 1-3 there is this amazing statement (which is just a tiny piece of the massive biblical evidence for why I'm a Calvinist!) that says,

Let us press on to maturity, leaving behind the former things...and this we will do if God permits.

When we looked at this, there fell across my congregation the most unbelievable silence, because we heard the implications. "You mean God might not permit a body of believers to press on to maturity?"

God is sovereign! He is sovereign in the church, and he is sovereign among the nations! One testimony to this is in the article in *Christianity Today* that came out a few weeks ago retelling of the story of Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Pete Flemming, Roger Youderian, and Ed McCully. Steve Saint tells the story of his dad getting speared by Auca Indians in Ecuador. He tells it after having learned new details of intrigue in the Auca tribe that were responsible for this killing when it shouldn't have happened, and seemingly wouldn't have and couldn't have. Yet it did happen. And having discovered

the intrigue he wrote this article.

I want to read one sentence that absolutely blew me out of my living room chair. He said,

As [the natives] described their recollections, it occurred to me how incredibly unlikely it was that the palm beach killing took place at all. It is an anomaly that I cannot explain outside of divine intervention.

“I can only explain the spearing of my dad by virtue of divine intervention.” Do you hear what this son is saying? “God killed my dad.” He believes that, and I believe that.

According to Revelation 6:11, when you have a glimpse of the throne room and the martyrs who shed their blood for the gospel saying,

How long O Lord? How long till you vindicate our blood?

the answer comes back,

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren should be complete who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

God says, “Rest until the number that I have appointed is complete.” He’s got a number of martyrs. When it is complete then the end will come.

THE PRICE IS SUFFERING

The price is suffering, and the volatility in the world today against the church is not decreasing. It is increasing, especially among the groups that need the gospel. There is no such thing as a closed country. It’s a foreign notion. It has no root or warrant in the Bible, and it would have been unintelligible to the apostle Paul who laid down his life in every city he went to. Therefore, there are martyrs in this room.

Statistically it’s easy to predict. One Sunday recently there was a focus

on the suffering church, and many of you were involved in it. World Missions Fellowship was involved in it, and you all saw videos or heard stories about places like Sudan where the Muslim regime is systematically ostracizing, positioning, and starving Christians so that there are about 500 martyrs a day there.

I get very tired of people coming to look at staff positions in my church, which is in downtown Minneapolis. We all live in the inner city, and one of the first questions they ask is, “Will my children be safe?” And I want to say, “Would you ask that question tenth and not first?” I’m just tired of hearing that. I’m tired of American priorities. Whoever said that your children will be safe in the call of God?

YWAM (Youth With A Mission) is a wild-eyed radical group that I love. I got an email on September 1st,

One hundred and fifty men armed with machetes surrounded the premises occupied by the YWAM team in India. The mob had been incited by other religious groups in an effort to chase them off. As the mob pressed in someone in a key moment spoke up on the team’s behalf and they decided to give them 30 days to leave. The team feels they should not leave and that their ministry work in the city is at stake. Much fruit has been seen in a previously unreached region and there is great potential for more. In the past when violence has broken out between rival religious groups people have lost their lives. Please pray for them to have wisdom.

Now this is exactly the opposite of what I hear mainly in America as people decide where to live, for example. I don’t hear people saying, “I don’t want to leave, because this is where I’m called to and this is where there’s need.” Would you please join me in reversing our self-centered priorities? It seems to be woven into the very fabric of our consumer culture that we move toward comfort, toward security, toward ease, toward safety, away from stress, away from trouble, and away from danger. It ought to be exactly the opposite! It was Jesus himself who said,

He who would come after me let him take up his cross and die! (Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23)

So I just don't get it! It's the absorption of a consumer, comfort, ease culture that is permeating the church. And it creates little ministries and churches in which safe, secure, nice things are done for each other. And little safe excursions are made to help save some others. But, Oh we won't live there, and Oh we won't stay there, not even in America, not to mention Saudi Arabia!

I was in Amsterdam a couple weeks ago talking to another wild-eyed wonderful missions group, Frontiers, led by Greg Livingstone. What a great group. Five hundred people sitting in front of me who risk their lives every day among Muslim peoples. And to listen to them! During the conference they were getting emails, which they would stand up and read, saying,

Please pray for X. He was stabbed in the chest three times yesterday, and the worst thing is his children were watching him. He's in the hospital in critical condition.

Then they say, "This is a missionary in the Muslim world, let's pray for him," and we would go to prayer. Next day another email comes, and this time six Christian brothers in Morocco have been arrested. "Let's pray for them," so we did. And so it was throughout the conference. And at the end of it the missionaries were ready to go back.

Do you think I'm going to come back to America and be the same? Do you think I'm going to stand up in front of my church and say, "Let's have nice, comfortable, easy services. Let's just be comfortable and secure."? Golgotha is not a suburb of Jerusalem.

Let us go with him outside the gate and suffer with him and bear reproach (Hebrews 13:13).

SUFFERING IS ALSO THE MEANS

But in saying that there will be martyrs and there must be suffering I haven't yet said the main thing about the price of getting the job done. That's

because suffering is the means and not just the price. It's the means.

Now here's what I have in my mind: I'm going to read a verse for you that's very important, that is, Colossians 1:24. A few years ago its meaning just came crashing in on me. I'll show you how I got it.

"Now I rejoice," Paul says, "in my sufferings." He was a very strange person. "I rejoice in my sufferings" is very counter-cultural, very un-American, very counter-human. "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of his Body [that is, the ingathering of God's elect] in filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." Now that's on the brink of blasphemy. What does he mean by "filling up what is lacking" in the afflictions of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ?

He does not mean that he improves upon the merit and the atoning worth of Jesus' blood. That's not what he means. Well then, what does he mean?

I typed into my computer Bible program the Greek word for "fill up" (or "complete") and the word for "what is lacking" and found only one other place in Scripture where both of these occur together. That's in Philippians 2:30.

The situation is that Epaphroditus was sent from the Philippian church over to Paul in Rome. He risks his life to get there, and Paul extols him for risking his life. He tells the Philippians that they should receive such a one with honor, because he was sick unto death and risked his neck to complete their ministry to him. Here's the key parallel verse:

Because he came close to death for the work of Christ,
risking his life to *complete what was lacking* in your service
to me.

This is the only other place where these two words come into conjunction: "to complete what was lacking in your service to me." I opened up my 100-year-old Vincent's commentary on Philippians and read an explanation of that verse which I think is a perfect interpretation of Colossians 1:24. Vincent says,

The gift to Paul from the Philippians was a gift of the

church as a body. It was a sacrificial offering of love. What was lacking was the church's presentation of this offering in person. This was impossible, and Paul represents Epaphroditus as supplying this lack by his affectionate, zealous ministry.

So the picture is of a church that wants to communicate love in the form of money over to Rome, and they can't do it. There's too many of them. And it's too far away. So they say, "Epaphroditus, represent us and complete what is lacking in our love. There's nothing lacking in our love except the expression of our love in person there. Take it and communicate it to Paul."

Now that's exactly what I think Colossians 1:24 means. Jesus dies and he suffers for people all over the world in every nation. Then he is buried and, according to the Scriptures, raised on the third day. Then he ascends into heaven where he reigns over the world. And he leaves a work to be done.

Paul's self-understanding of his mission is that there is one thing lacking in the sufferings of Jesus. The love offering of Christ is to be presented in person through missionaries to the peoples for whom he died. And Paul says, "I do this in my sufferings. In my sufferings I complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." Which means that Christ intends for the Great Commission to be a presentation to the nations of the sufferings of his cross through the sufferings of his people. That's the way it will be finished. If you sign up for the Great Commission, that's what you sign up for.

About three years ago I was working on *Let the Nations Be Glad*, and I hid away at Trinity Seminary in Deerfield, IL. I hid because I didn't want anybody to know that I was there, so that they wouldn't bother me. My wife and kids were at home, and I was working 18 hours a day.

Then I got word that J. Oswald Sanders was going to be in chapel. Eighty-nine years old. Veteran. Great missions leader. And I said to myself, "Shall I go public and risk having to talk to a lot of people and getting dinner engagements and all this stuff and not getting anything done?" But I wanted to hear him, so I snuck into the back of chapel and listened to him. And this 89-year-old man stood up there, and I was just oozing with admiration and desire to be like this when I'm 89. And he told a story that

so embodies Colossians 1:24.

He said there was once an evangelist in India who tromped across the roads to various villages preaching the gospel. He was a simple man, no education, loved Jesus with all his heart, and was ready to lay his life down. And he came to a village that didn't have the gospel. It was late in the day and he was very tired. But he goes into the village and lifts up his voice and shares the gospel with those gathered in the square. They mock him, deride him, and drive him out of town. And he is so tired—no emotional resources left—that he lies down under a tree, utterly discouraged. He goes to sleep not knowing if he'll ever wake up. They might come kill him, for all he knows.

And suddenly, just after dusk, he is startled and wakes up. The whole town seems to be around him looking at him. He thinks he's a goner. He starts to tremble, and one of the big men in the village says, "We came out to see what kind of man you were, and when we saw your blistered feet we knew you were a holy man. We want you to tell us why you got blistered feet to come talk to us." So he preached the gospel and, according to J. Oswald Sanders, the whole village believed. That's what Paul means by "I complete in my sufferings what is lacking in the afflictions of Jesus."

Now I have one other little parenthesis about J. Oswald Sanders. At 89 years old he said, "I've written a book a year since I was 70." Eighteen books after 70! There are people in my church and all over America quitting on life at 65 and dying on the golf course in Nevada, when they ought to be laying their lives down among the Muslims like Raymond Lull.

Raymond Lull, 12th-century Oriental scholar and Muslim missionary, retires and comes back to Italy. He does his Oriental language thing for a while but eventually quits and begins to ask, "What am I doing? I'm going to die here in Italy. Why not die in Algeria across the Mediterranean?" And so, knowing that's what it will cost him to preach publicly, he gets on a boat at 80-something years of age and crosses the Mediterranean. He stays underground a while encouraging the church, and then he decides this as good a time as any. So he stands up and preaches, and they kill him. What a way to go!

Listen, you 60-year-old folks, I'm 50. I'm almost there. I'm getting letters from the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), and they're

trying to get me on their lists so I can get discounts on trains and airplanes. I'm almost there, so I'm talking to myself here (and my church has heard me say this and they're going to hold me to the fire) when I say that when you're old you not only don't have anything to lose in martyrdom, you get discount fares.

Why should we think that putting in our 40 or 50 years on the job should mean that we should play for the last 15 years before we meet the King? I don't get it. It's all American lies. We're strong at 65 and we're strong at 70. My dad is 77. I can remember when my mom was killed, and he was almost killed, in a bus accident in Israel. And I picked him up ten days later with her body and him in the ambulance, and all the way home from Atlanta to Greenville he laid there with his back wide open, because the wounds were so bad they couldn't stitch them. And he kept saying, "God must have a purpose for me, God must have a purpose for me!"

And here we are 22 years later, and his life has exploded with ministry! He's working harder today at 77 for the nations than ever before. He prepares lessons from Easley, South Carolina, including some tapes. And they're in 60 nations with about 10,000 people believing in Jesus every year because God spared my dad and caused him not to believe in retirement.

THE PRIZE IS SATISFYING

Now the last point: How do you love like that? Where are you going to get this? Are you feeling ready for this? Do you think you have it within you to be able to endure this?

Read Stephen Neill's *A History of Christian Missions*. On page 161 he describes what happened in Japan when the gospel came there in the 1500's. The Emperor began to believe that the incursion of the Christian faith into their religious sphere was so threatening that they must end it. And he did end it, with absolutely incredible brutality! It was over for the church in Japan. And I don't doubt that the hardness and difficulty of Japan today is largely owing to the massive (though short-term) triumph of the devil in the early 1600's.

Twenty-seven Jesuits, fifteen friars, and five secular clergy did manage to evade the order of banishment. It was not until April 1617 that the first martyrdoms of Europeans took place, a Jesuit and a Franciscan being be-

headed at Omura at that time, and a Dominican and an Augustinian a little later in the same area. Every kind of cruelty was practiced on the pitiable victims of the persecution. Crucifixion was the method usually employed in the case of Japanese Christians. On one occasion 70 Japanese at Yedo were crucified upside down at low water and were drowned as the tide came in.

I cried three days ago when I read that, because I've got a good enough imagination to picture the lapping water with your wife on one side and your sixteen-year-old on the other.

Are you ready? You think you've got that within you? You don't. No way does anybody have that kind of resourcefulness within them. Where are you going to get it? That's what I want to close with.

You're going to get it by believing the promises of God. Hebrews 10:32-34 is my favorite text about where you get the resources to live like this.

Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

Now let me stop there and give you the situation as I read it. In the early days of the church persecution arose. Some of them suffered outright and publicly, and others had compassion on them. You'll see in the next verse that some of them were imprisoned and some of them went to visit them. So they were forced into a decision. Those who were in prison in those days probably depended on others for food and water and any kind of physical care that they would need, but that meant that their friends and neighbors had to go public and identify with them. That's risky business when someone's been put in jail because they're a Christian. So those who were still free went underground for a few hours and asked, "What are we going to do?" And somebody said "Psalm 63:3 says, 'The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life.' It's better than life. Let's go!"

And if Martin Luther would have been there he would have said,

Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also.

The body they may kill,
God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.

Let's go!

And that's exactly what they did. Here's the rest of it. Hebrews 10:34:

You had compassion on the prisoners and you joyfully
accepted the plundering of your property.

Now here's what happened. It doesn't take any imagination. I don't know all the details precisely, but here's what happened: They had compassion on the prisoners, which means they went to them. And their property—house, chariot, horses, mules, carpentry tools, chairs, whatever—was set on fire by mob or maybe just ransacked and thrown to the streets by people with big knives. And when they looked over their shoulder to see what was happening back there they rejoiced.

Now if you're not like this—when somebody bashes your computer when you're trying to minister to them, or you drive downtown to minister and they smash your windshield, get your radio, or slash your tires—if you're not like this, you're not going to be a very good candidate for martyrdom either. So the question is, "How are you going to be like this?" I want to be like this. That's why I love this text! I want to be like this.

I make no claim to be a perfect embodiment of this; but I want to be like this, so that when a rock comes sailing through my kitchen window—like it has done twice in the last couple of months—and smashes the glass and my wife and children hit the floor not knowing if it's a bullet or a grenade, I want to be able to say, "Isn't this a great neighborhood to live in?" This is where the needs are. You see those five teenage kids that just rode by? They need Jesus. If I move out of here, who's going to tell them about Jesus?

When your little boy gets pushed off his bicycle and they take it and run, I want to be able to take him by the neck while he's crying and say "Barnabas, this is like being a missionary. It's like getting ready for the mission field! This is great!"

Now I haven't gotten to the main point of the text yet. How did they

have the wherewithal to rejoice at the plundering of their property and the risking of their lives? Now we get it:

Since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession
and an abiding one.

This is what I call *faith in future grace*.

If you are a Christian, God is holding out to you indescribably wonderful promises. “I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ Therefore, you can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6) Well, actually, man can kill you. But that is no defeat, because you know what Romans 8:36-39 says:

We are counted as sheep to be slaughtered all day long...
Yet I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels,
nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all
creation can separate me from the love of God in Christ
Jesus.

Therefore, nothing ultimately can harm you. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 21:12-19?

Some of you they will kill and some of you they will throw
into prison...Yet not a hair of your head will perish.

“Some of you they will kill...yet not a hair of your head will perish.” It’s just Romans 8. Everything, including death, works together for your good. When you die you don’t perish. To die is gain.

Doing missions when death is gain is the greatest life in the world.

So I pray that you will come along and leave behind the American way of security and ease and comfort and retreat and withdrawal and emptiness. Leave it behind and join this incredibly powerful movement. There are students all over the world—like in South Korea—ready to stand up and lay down their lives for Christ. I invite you to do it, too.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

**“I AM SENDING YOU OUT AS SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF
WOLVES”**

JOHN PIPER

OCTOBER 21, 2007

Matthew 10:16–31

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those

who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

When Jesus had finished his great saving work, and had laid down his life to save millions and millions of people who would believe in him, and had risen from the dead, he gave this final mandate to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

That mandate—to go and make disciples of all the peoples of the world—is as valid today as the promise that supports it: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” If the promise is valid today, then the mandate is valid today. And the promise is valid because it’s good, Jesus said, “to the end of the age.” So until Jesus returns the promise holds that he will be with us. And that promise is the basis of the mandate, and so the mandate holds today. Jesus is commanding us—commanding Bethlehem—“Go make disciples of all nations.”

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S AMBITION: FRONTIER MISSIONS

The apostle Paul is the most prominent missionary in the New Testament. He gave his life in obedience to Jesus’ mandate. He said in Romans 15:20-21,

I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone

else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

This is the difference between the local evangelist and a frontier missionary. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, "Do the work of an evangelist." That means: As the pastor of a local church in a place where the gospel has already taken root, keep on winning people to Jesus. They may know about Christianity and live near lots of Christians there in Ephesus, but keep on evangelizing them. Tell them the gospel. Show them love. Keep on trying to win them. That's local evangelism. And all of us should be a part of it.

But this is not what we mean by frontier missions. Frontier missions is what Paul did: "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation." Frontier missions is crossing a culture to plant the church where the gospel has not already taken root. This is the mandate that is still valid for us today. The job is not done. And the word of our risen King Jesus is binding on us today as much as when he first gave it.

UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS

This is why we speak of unreached people groups. Jesus gave the mandate to us to make disciples of all these groups, and Paul modeled what frontier missions looks like, making it his ambition to proclaim the gospel where the church was not already planted. And today the mandate holds ("Make disciples of all nations"), and the promise holds ("I will be with you to the end of the age"), and the stakes are eternal ("Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him," John 3:36).

WHO WILL GO?

So the question is, "Who will go? Who will proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ where the church is not yet planted and flourishing? Should I go? I ask myself this at least once a year. And I mean it seriously. I am willing to go. I think every follower of Jesus is bound by the cords of love and obedience to say, "I am willing to follow you wherever you lead me." Every

believer in Jesus should say, "Here am I, send me, if that is your will."

It is not the Lord's will that all of his followers be frontier missionaries. But some he calls. How he does it is a wonderful and mysterious thing. No one can explain how the work of God in your life rises to the level of a compelling call to missions. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is marvelous and unfathomable in our eyes. But this we know, from Scripture and from church history and experience, that one of the instruments God uses to awaken a compelling calling to missions is the preaching of the word of God. And specifically the preaching of passages of Scripture that describe the mandate and its costs and blessings. So that is what I want to do in the time we have left.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN TO JUDGE ISRAEL

In Matthew 10:16-33, Jesus is telling his disciples what it will cost to bear faithful witness and make disciples in the coming years and what blessings they can count on to sustain them. The text relates directly to the next forty years after he departs, but it is true in principle for the rest of the age. He says in verse 23,

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

I don't understand the "coming of the Son of Man" in this verse as the second coming of Christ. If it were, this text would be false.

Just like the New Testament speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God in several stages and manifestations, it also helps to think of the coming of the Son of Man in several stages and manifestations. He came to earth the first time and died; he came as the risen Christ from the dead; he came in judgment in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans armies; he has come in power from time to time in Great Awakenings. And he will come in visible bodily form at the end of the age.

So I take Matthew 10:23 to refer probably to the coming in judgment in AD 70. "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before

the Son of Man comes to judge the Israel”—which happened in a decisive way forty years later.

A FEARLESS WITNESS IN THE FACE OF DANGER

But the fact that these verses refer directly to the work of spreading the gospel to unreached people between AD 30 and 70 does not mean they are irrelevant for us. What Jesus says about the cost and the blessings of the missionary mandate in these verses is true today. And his main point is crystal clear: Be a fearless witness in the face of danger. My prayer, as I draw your attention to it, is that the Holy Spirit would use it to awaken or confirm his calling on your life.

SIX COSTS OF FRONTIER MISSIONS

This text powerfully speaks for itself. So let me, without too much comment, focus our attention on six costs and ten blessings of being on the frontline of frontier missions. These difficulties are the kind of thing we may expect today even if in God's forbearance we may be spared some of them. First the costs.

1. The cost of being arrested by authorities. Verses 16-18:

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

2. The cost of family betrayal. Verse 21:

Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.

This is almost unbelievable: Fathers and children will so be so opposed to

the Christian faith, they will want each other dead rather than believing.

3. The cost of being hated by all. Verse 22:

You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

Be careful that you don't elevate friendship evangelism to the point where this text makes evangelism impossible. You will be hated by all does not mean: You can't do evangelism.

4. The cost of being persecuted and driven out of town. Verse 23:

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next.

5. The cost of being maligned. Verse 25b:

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

Jesus died in our place so that we might escape the wrath of God, not the wrath of man. He was called to suffer for the sake of propitiation; we are called to suffer for the sake of propagation.

6. The cost of being killed. Verse 28:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

So they can kill the body. And sometimes they do. Don't ever elevate safety in missions to the point where you assume that if one of our missionaries is killed we have made a mistake. Jesus said plainly in Luke 21:16,

Some of you they will put to death.

For two thousand years, thousands of missionaries—unnamed people of

whom the world is not worthy—have counted this cost and put their lives at risk to reach the lost with the only message of salvation in the world. And the reason they could do this is because the blessings so outweigh the costs.

TEN BLESSINGS OF FRONTIER MISSIONS

May the Lord make these ten blessings that I am about to name overcome all your fears and give you a passion to know him like this.

1. The blessing of being sent by Christ. Verse 16:

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

“I am sending you out.” It is deeply satisfying thing to be sent by the living Christ into his work.

2. The blessing of being given words by the Spirit of God. Verses 19-20:

When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

What a wonderful thing it is to sense the presence and power of the Spirit in your life, giving you the words you need.

3. The blessing of experiencing God’s fatherly care. Verse 20b:

For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Jesus makes explicit that the one caring for you is your Father in heaven. You may have to leave father and mother to be a missionary. But you will always have a Father who cares for you.

4. The blessing of salvation at the end of it all. Verse 22b:

But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

When all the costs have been paid, we will have the great end of salvation. We will be raised from the dead with no sorrow or pain or sin, and we will see Christ and enter in to his joy and hear the words, in spite of all our imperfections, "Well done."

5. The blessing of knowing that the Son of Man is coming in judgment and mercy. Verse 23b:

You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

This was a great encouragement to those persecuted disciples. Jesus comes at just the right time in historical judgments and deliverances, and he will come at the last day and vindicate all his people.

6. The blessing of belonging to Jesus' household. Verse 25b:

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

Whatever rejection we may experience, Jesus wants us to be sure we are ever aware: This rejection is a sign that you are mine. You are part of my household.

7. The blessing of knowing that the truth will triumph. Verse 26:

So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

Nothing is hidden that will not be known. For a season in this world, people will mock your proclamation of the truth. They will say, "What

is truth!” But know this, and hold fast to this blessing: The truth will be known. Your proclamation will be vindicated. “Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” Count on it. What is scoffed at now will be written across the sky someday. And one minute of that vindication before all your enemies will make every act of patient endurance worthwhile.

8. The blessing of having an immortal soul. The soul of the Christian is indestructible.

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life (John 5:24).

We have already passed from death to life. Henry Martyn, the missionary to Persia, said that he was immortal until his work on earth was done. True. And he would have also agreed that in the fuller sense: You are immortal after your work on earth is done. That is Jesus’ point here.

9. The blessing of having a heavenly Father who sovereignly rules the smallest details of life. Verse 29:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

Jesus mentions the fall of a sparrow to the ground because nothing seemed more insignificant than that. Yet God, your Father, oversees that and governs that. So you may always know that your Father, who loves you as his precious child, oversees and governs every detail of your life.

10. The blessing of being valued by God. Verse 31:

Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

God does not despise his children. He values his children. For two reasons: One is that in union with Jesus Christ all of his perfection is imputed to us. The other is that by the Spirit, we are being changed from one degree of glory to the next, and God loves the sanctifying work of his own hands. He delights in what we are becoming.

GOD'S CALL TO FRONTIER MISSIONS

How does God call people to give their lives in missions? He does it, along with other influences, by the mysterious and wonderful awakening of fear-conquering desire for the work through the preaching of his word. He does it by helping us count the costs so there is no romantic naïveté about missions. And he does it by filling us with a longing to know these blessings to the full.

For many of you God has been doing this for some time now. And this message is a seal to what has already been done. For others of you, this message has awakened a new sense of calling. And you really believe God is stirring you to go. May the Lord confirm his work in your life.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER TWELVE

DECLARE HIS GLORY AMONG THE NATIONS¹⁴

JOHN PIPER

JUNE 29, 2008

In this final message, I want to strike two notes: singing and nations—music and missions—for the glory of God. These are what stand out to me from Psalm 96. How shall we think and feel with God about nations and about singing, and how are they related in this psalm and in the age to come? And how are they related to Jesus?

Here is the way I am thinking about the sequence of these messages. After the overview from Psalm 1 to establish that the Psalms are God's word and that Psalms are songs, and therefore they aim to shape our thinking and our feeling, we looked at spiritual depression and how to be discouraged well (Psalm 42). Then we looked at guilt and regret and how to be brokenhearted well (Psalm 51). Then, coming out of that discouragement and regret, we rose into gratitude and praise and blessing the Lord (Psalm 103).

Then last time we saw that we are often bitterly opposed and sometimes horribly treated and that the heart cries out for justice and for the punishment of our adversaries (Psalm 69). And we found relief from this rage in the assurance that the imprecatory psalms will indeed be fulfilled, and all wrongs will be duly punished, either on the cross of Christ for those who repent, or in hell, for those who don't. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord. As for you, love your enemy. God will handle those who sin against you. Nobody gets away with anything in the universe.

Jesus Christ has been the key and goal of all these Psalms. They are not complete without him. So it will be today.

MADE FOR GLOBAL PURPOSES

So now with our anger relieved, and our sense of justice sustained, and our

¹⁴This is the final message in a series of sermons entitled "Psalms: Thinking and Feeling with God." These messages are referred to throughout the message and can be found online at www.desiringgod.org.

hearts full of gratefulness that as far as the east is from the west so far are our transgressions removed from us (Psalm 103:12), and our mouths and souls full of blessing to God for all his goodness, what could be missing? Where do the Psalms take us finally? The answer is that God has made you for global purposes. God has made you for something very large.

STRIKING THE *NATIONS* NOTE

You may think that, when discouragement is past and guilt is relieved and anger is assuaged and your mouth is full of blessing, the reason for your existence has been attained. In one sense, you would be right. There will be nothing greater than blessing the Lord with overflowing praise and gratitude.

But there is something missing. God did not make known his ways or reveal his glory or display his marvelous works for you alone, or for your ethnic group alone. He did it with a view to the nations—all the nations, not political states, but nations like the Cherokee Nation, the Navaho Nation, the Waorani Nation. “Peoples” the Psalm calls them. So the first note we will strike is the nations note.

FOR THE NATIONS

Trace with me the focus on nations in this Psalm. The psalmist says that God’s people should do at least three things for the nations.

1. DECLARE GOD’S GLORY

First, declare to them the truth about God’s glory and works and salvation. Verses 2–3,

Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

Tell of his salvation, declare his glory, declare his marvelous works. Do this “among the nations.” Do this “among all the peoples.” All of them. Leave none out. Verse 10 sums up your declaration with the message of the kingship of God over the nations,

Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns!”

2. SUMMON THE NATIONS TO JOIN IN

Second: Summon the nations to join the people of God in ascribing glory to God and singing praise to him. Verse 7:

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!

Verse 1:

Sing to the Lord, all the earth!

So, don't just tell the earth the facts about the greatness and the glory of God; bid them to join you in praising him. Call for their conversion. All the nations must bow before the one true God of Israel, whom we know now as the Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

3. WARN THEM OF JUDGMENT

Third, don't just declare his glory to them, and don't just summon them to join in ascribing glory to him, but warn them that the reason they must do this is that they are depending on false gods and judgment is coming on all the nations. Verse 5:

All the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Verse 10:

Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.

Verse 13:

He comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge

the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

In other words, when he says, “Sing to the Lord, all the earth,” and, “Declare...his marvelous works among all the peoples,” and, “He is to be feared above all gods,” and “Tremble before him, all the earth,” and, “All the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,” he really means all. The God of the Psalms lays claim on the allegiance of every people. All of them—in all their unimaginable diversity of culture and religion.

EVERY NATION, ALL THE PEOPLES

Do not, the psalm implies, leave out any nation, any people, any family—all of them must convert to the true and living God and abandon all their other gods. Do not let any unloving trend of multiculturalism make you shrink back from the loving work of calling every people from every other religion to repent and ascribe all glory to the one and only true and living God.

Listen to this (not from Psalm 96) and see if you can guess where it is coming from:

“I will praise you among the Gentiles (nations), and sing to your name.” And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles (nations), with his people.” And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles (nations), and let all the peoples extol him.” And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles (nations); in him will the Gentiles (nations) hope.” (Romans 15:9–12)

Those are quotes from the Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah piled up by the apostle Paul to support what? The coming of Jesus as the Messiah for all nations. Here’s the context (verses 8–9):

I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised [the Jews] to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the

Gentiles (the nations) might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written...

Then come the Old Testament promises summoning all the nations to praise God for his mercy, namely, for the work of Jesus Christ on the cross in dying for sinners and making mercy possible for rebel, Gentile sinners like us.

MADE TO SING OF GLORY

How should you feel about this emphasis on all the nations, and all the peoples in Psalm 96? And in the New Testament? God is not telling us this for the purposes of feeling exhausted, but for the purposes of feeling exhilarated. And I mean both missionary goers and missionary senders—all of us who believe in the one true God, revealed most fully in the God-man Jesus Christ.

Why do I say this? Look at verse 1. This missionary impulse to all the nations is flowing from singing and calling for singing.

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!

This is a singing mission. This is the way you feel when your team has won the Super Bowl or the World Cup or the cross-town rivalry—only a thousand times greater.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!

We are speaking of glory. We are speaking of marvelous works, not boring works. Nor ordinary works. We have tasted and seen that this God is greater to know than all other greatness.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised (verse 4).

We are exhilarated to know him and sing to him and call the world to sing

with us to him.

You were made for this. I mean all of you who say from the heart, “Jesus is Lord.” When you confess Jesus as the Lord of the universe, you sign up for significance beyond all your dreams. I mean businessmen, homemakers, students. To belong to Jesus is to embrace nations for which he died and which he will rule. Your heart was made for this, and there will always be a serious or mild sickness in your soul until you embrace this global calling.

THE LARGEST CAUSE OF ALL

Listen to J. Campbell White, the first secretary of the Layman’s Missionary Movement in the early 1900’s. This movement was born among businessmen who were captured by a holy ambition to get behind what God was doing in the massive Student Volunteer Movement. Here is what the main leader among laymen said:

Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ’s purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ’s undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards. (J. Campbell White, “The Layman’s Missionary Movement,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 225)

How should you feel about the global purpose of Jesus Christ to be glorified among all the nations? You should feel like this cause is the consummation of your significance in life. Many other things are important in life. But this is the largest cause of all. Every follower of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings embraces this purpose and finds the consummation of his reason for living in being a part of this great purpose of God to be glorified among all the nations.

STUNNING SHIFTS AMONG THE NATIONS

And what is the situation among the nations today? Stunning shifts are taking place as God gathers his elect from all the nations and sends his church to all the nations. Europe and America are not the center of gravity in world Christianity any longer. The center is shifting south and east. Latin America, Africa, and Asia are experiencing phenomenal growth and are becoming the great sending churches. Read about this in Philip Jenkins' books *The Next Christendom* and *The New Faces of Christianity*.

But I would plead that all of you become familiar with Joshua Project and People Groups. Here you find out who the nations, in the biblical sense, actually are and how many there are and how reached or unreached with the gospel they are. Joshua Project says there are 1,569 unengaged people groups (no missionaries or church), and 6,747 least reached groups (fewer than 2% evangelical). How I thank God that there are people doing this difficult work of research to help us know the task that remains before us. Go to these sites, and start learning what the global situation is. And then dream how your life as goer and sender might be more fully involved in declaring his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

How should you feel about the nations of the world? A passion for their salvation and a thrill that God rules over them all and calls us to be his emissaries to them all with the best news in the world, and that he will have a people of his own from all the nations, singing to him and ascribing glory and strength to his Son. You were made for this kind of joy. All the other joys of the Psalms, all the other emotions of the psalms, are taking us here: the glory of God celebrated and sung by all the peoples of the earth.

Which brings us to our second note to strike in this message: singing.

STRIKING THE SINGING NOTE

Flying like a banner over all the emphasis on the nations in this psalm are verses 1 and 2, and they are all about singing.

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Why would you begin a psalm about the global reach of God's kingdom and the duty to "tell of his salvation from day to day" and to "declare his glory among the nations"—why would you begin such a psalm with the command to sing to the Lord a new song?

The answer is simple: You can't summon the nations to sing if you yourself are not singing. And we are summoning the nations to sing. Verse 1:

Sing to the Lord all the earth.

Verse 11 says,

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice.

Even nature is being summoned to be glad. And singing is the consummation of that gladness and that rejoicing. This psalm is calling us to spread a passion for the glory of God in all things for the joy all peoples. And then to summon them to ascribe this glory to God in songs. This is the hardest and the happiest business in the world.

And you can't summon the nations to sing if you are not singing. So let me suggest why in this global missionary context the psalm would stress singing new songs. Notice that these new songs are "to the Lord." Not just about the Lord. Verse 1: "Sing to the Lord a new song." It's not wrong to sing about the Lord. The Psalms do it all the time. But when new songs are being written and composed and sung "to the Lord," something is happening in the church. It's a sign of unusual life and vibrancy. People are not just living off the spiritual capital of previous generations, but they are dealing vibrantly with the living God and their songs are being sung to him. He is real. He is personal. He is known. He is precious. He is present. Worship is more intense and more personal and more engaging.

A NEW SONG IN OUR DAY

That is what the psalm calls for, and that is what has been happening during my entire adult life. Around the world there is a new song and a new vibrancy and a new personal engagement in singing to the Lord. And the really astonishing thing in our time is the way this awakening of singing to

the Lord with new songs has such a strong global and missionary flavor. To my knowledge singing has never been more at the forefront of missions as it is today.

God is doing something wonderful in the fulfillment of Psalm 96. It is far bigger than any one church, or any one ethnic group, or any one region of the world. The global church is singing—singing to the Lord, singing new songs, and singing about God’s Lordship over the nations.

And I would simply say: Don’t miss what God is doing. Be a part of it. Get the nations on your heart. Think rightly about God’s global purposes. Feel deeply about his marvelous works. Sing with all your heart to the Lord. And be a part of summoning the nations to join you.

THE CENTER OF OUR SINGING

And may the center of our singing be the same as the center of the new song we will sing in the age to come, namely, the song of the Lamb who was slain.

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:9–10)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

PROSPERITY PREACHING: DECEITFUL AND DEADLY

JOHN PIPER

FEBRUARY 14, 2007

When I read about prosperity-preaching churches, my response is: “If I were not on the inside of Christianity, I wouldn’t want in.” In other words, if this is the message of Jesus, no thank you.

Luring people to Christ to get rich is both deceitful and deadly. It’s deceitful because when Jesus himself called us, he said things like:

Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

And it’s deadly because the desire to be rich plunges “people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9). So here is my plea to preachers and ministers of the gospel—both stateside and abroad.

1. DON’T DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT MAKES IT HARDER FOR PEOPLE TO GET INTO HEAVEN.

Jesus said, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” His disciples were astonished, as many in the “prosperity” movement should be. So Jesus went on to raise their astonishment even higher by saying, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” They respond in disbelief: “Then who can be saved?” Jesus says, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:23-27).

My question for prosperity preachers is: Why would you want to develop a ministry focus that makes it harder for people to enter heaven?

2. DO NOT DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT KINDLES SUICIDAL DESIRES IN PEOPLE.

Paul said, “There is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought

nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” But then he warned against the desire to be rich. And by implication, he warned against preachers who stir up the desire to be rich instead of helping people get rid of it. He warned, “Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

So my question for prosperity preachers is: Why would you want to develop a ministry that encourages people to pierce themselves with many pangs and plunge themselves into ruin and destruction?

3. DO NOT DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT ENCOURAGES VULNERABILITY TO MOTH AND RUST.

Jesus warns against the effort to lay up treasures on earth. That is, he tells us to be givers, not keepers.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19).

Yes, we all keep something. But given the built-in tendency toward greed in all of us, why would we take the focus off Jesus and turn it upside down?

4. DON'T DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT MAKES HARD WORK A MEANS OF AMASSING WEALTH.

Paul said we should not steal. The alternative was hard work with our own hands. But the main purpose was not merely to hoard or even to have. The purpose was “to have to give.”

Let him labor, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him who is in need (Ephesians 4:28).

This is not a justification for being rich in order to give more. It is a call to make more and keep less so you can give more. There is no reason why a person who makes a lot should live any differently from the way a person who makes just enough lives. Find a wartime lifestyle; cap your expenditures; then give the rest away.

Why would you want to encourage people to think that they should possess wealth in order to be a lavish giver? Why not encourage them to keep their lives more simple and be an even more lavish giver? Would that not add to their generosity a strong testimony that Christ, and not possessions, is their treasure?

5. DON'T DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT PROMOTES LESS FAITH IN THE PROMISES OF GOD TO BE FOR US WHAT MONEY CAN'T BE.

The reason the writer to the Hebrews tells us to be content with what we have is that the opposite implies less faith in the promises of God. He says,

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

If the Bible tells us that being content with what we have honors the promise of God never to forsake us, why would we want to teach people to want to be rich?

6. DON'T DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT CONTRIBUTES TO YOUR PEOPLE BEING CHOKED TO DEATH.

Jesus warns that the word of God, which is meant to give us life, can be choked off from any effectiveness by riches. He says it is like a seed that grows up among thorns that choke it to death:

They are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the...riches...of life, and their fruit does

not mature (Luke 8:14).

Why would we want to encourage people to pursue the very thing that Jesus warns will choke us to death?

7. DON'T DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY THAT TAKES THE SEASONING OUT OF THE SALT AND PUTS THE LIGHT UNDER A BASKET.

What is it about Christians that makes them the salt of the earth and the light of the world? It is not wealth. The desire for wealth and the pursuit of wealth tastes and looks just like the world. It does not offer the world anything different from what it already believes in. The great tragedy of prosperity-preaching is that a person does not have to be spiritually awakened in order to embrace it; one needs only to be greedy. Getting rich in the name of Jesus is not the salt of the earth or the light of the world. In this, the world simply sees a reflection of itself. And if it works, they will buy it.

The context of Jesus' saying shows us what the salt and light are. They are the joyful willingness to suffering for Christ. Here is what Jesus said,

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world (Matthew 5:11-14).

What will make the world taste (the salt) and see (the light) of Christ in us is not that we love wealth the same way they do. Rather, it will be the willingness and the ability of Christians to love others through suffering, all the while rejoicing because their reward is in heaven with Jesus. This is inexplicable on human terms. This is supernatural. But to attract people with promises of prosperity is simply natural. It is not the message of Jesus. It is not what he died to achieve.

APPENDIX TWO

DRIVING CONVICTIONS BEHIND CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONS

JOHN PIPER

JANUARY 1, 1996

ADAPTED FROM “DRIVING CONVICTIONS BEHIND FOREIGN MISSIONS AT BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH”

There are at least 14 convictions that have driven Bethlehem’s commitment to missions in recent years. The leadership knows them and loves them. They shape all we do. If you are a part of Bethlehem, you need to know them too.

May the Lord cause them to capture your heart and fill you with fresh zeal for the greatest cause in the world. There are only three kinds of Christians when it comes to world missions: zealous goers, zealous senders, and disobedient. May God deliver us from disobedience!

CONVICTION #1—GOD’S GOAL IN CREATION AND REDEMPTION IS A MISSIONARY GOAL BECAUSE OUR GOD IS A MISSIONARY GOD

God created man and woman to fill the earth as his image-bearers (Genesis 1:26–28). He created us for his glory (Isaiah 43:7)—not to gain more glory for himself but to invite people from every tribe and tongue and nation into the enjoyment of his glory.

God is perfectly glorious and self-sufficient in the fellowship of the Trinity. So he had no need for people to praise him, but he had a profound desire to share his glory and joy with a redeemed people.

God’s desire to bless all the nations to the praise of his glory is the golden thread weaving its way through the Scriptures and the history of redemption. Jesus Christ himself in his self-emptying and in his identification with sinful humanity to the point of his substitutionary death on the cross is the perfect manifestation of the missionary heart of God.

CONVICTION #2—GOD IS PASSIONATELY COMMITTED TO HIS FAME. GOD’S ULTIMATE GOAL IS THAT HIS NAME BE KNOWN AND PRAISED BY ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH.

In Romans 9:17, Paul says that God’s goal in redeeming Israel is “that [his] name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” In Isaiah 66:19, God promised that he would send messengers “to the coastlands afar off that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations.”

We believe that the central command of world missions is Isaiah 12:4, “Make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.”

The apostle Paul said that his ministry as a missionary was “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Christ’s] name among all the nations” (Romans 1:5). The apostle John said that missionaries are those who “have set out for the sake of the name” (3 John 7). James, the Lord’s brother, described missions as God’s “visiting the nations to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). Jesus described missionaries as those who “leave houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake” (Matthew 19:29).

CONVICTION #3—WORSHIP IS THE FUEL AND THE GOAL OF MISSIONS.

Back in the mid-80s God drove home to many of us that a God-centered theology must be a missionary theology. If you say that you love the glory of God, the test of your authenticity is whether you love the spread of that glory among all the peoples of the world.

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. God’s passion is to be known and honored and worshipped among all the peoples. To worship him is to share that passion for his supremacy among the nations.

In heaven there will be no missions; only worship. Gathered around the throne will be worshipers from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 7:7). Thus the goal of missions will have been accomplished. But until that is the case, true worshipers who have tasted the goodness of the Lord will not be content until they have invited the nations to

join them in the feast.

Worship is an expansive and a contagious joy, and thus it becomes the fuel for missions. A shared joy is a doubled joy. Gladness in God will produce in us the same yearnings felt by the psalmist, “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy” (Psalm 67:3–4). Our hearts’ desire is to join Jesus and the Father in their pursuit of true worshipers (John 4:23).

CONVICTION #4—GOD’S PASSION TO BE KNOWN AND PRAISED BY ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH IS NOT SELFISH, BUT LOVING.

God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the ultimately loving act. And the reason is easy to see. The one and only Reality in the universe that can fully and eternally satisfy the human heart is the glory of God—the beauty of all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, God would not be loving unless he upholds and displays and magnifies that glory for our everlasting enjoyment.

If God were to forsake or dishonor or disregard the infinite worth of his own glory, he would be unloving in the same way that a husband is unloving who commits suicide.

Perhaps the best way to see that God’s passion for his fame is an expression of his love is to notice that God’s mercy is the pinnacle of his glory. This is what he wants to be honored for above all else. You can see this in Romans 15:9 where Paul says that the reason Christ came into the world was so “that the nations might glorify God for his mercy.”

Do you see how the convictions already mentioned come together in that little phrase: “glorify God for his mercy”? God gets the glory; we get the mercy. God is praised; we are saved. God gets the honor; we get the joy. God is glorified for his fullness; we are satisfied with his mercy.

So to sum up our convictions so far, there are two basic problems in the universe: God is profaned and people are perishing. God will not suffer his name to be dishonored indefinitely, but will act mightily to vindicate his name and glorify himself among the nations. God has planned a way to do this by saving the perishing through the death of his Son, Jesus, and making them a worshipping people who enjoy his glory.

In the sacrifice of his own Son for the sake of the nations, God reveals

the pinnacle of his glory—his mercy. So the salvation of the nations and the glorification of God happen together in missions. They are not at odds. It is a loving thing for God to pursue his glory like this.

CONVICTION #5—GOD’S PURPOSE TO BE PRAISED AMONG ALL THE NATIONS CANNOT FAIL. IT IS AN ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN PROMISE. IT IS GOING TO HAPPEN.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, he gave it a massive foundation of certainty. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore...”

In other words, nothing can stop him: “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

There are four reasons we can be absolutely sure that the mission of God will triumph in the world.

1. First, the word of Jesus is more sure than the heavens and the earth (Matthew 24:35).
2. Second, the ransom has already been paid for all God’s elect, and God did not spill the blood of his Son in vain (Revelation 5:9).
3. Third, the glory of God is at stake and in the end he will not share his glory with another (Isaiah 48:9–11).
4. Fourth, God is sovereign and can do all things and no purpose of his can be thwarted (Job 42:2).

In the September 16, 1996, issue of *Christianity Today* (p. 25) Steve Saint, whose dad, Nate Saint, was martyred in Ecuador in 1956 by the Auca Indians, wrote an article about new discoveries made about the tribal intrigue behind the slayings of Nate Saint, Jim Elliot, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, and Pete Fleming. He wrote one of the most amazing sentences on the sovereignty of God we have ever read—especially when you hear it coming from the son of a slain missionary:

As [the killers] described their recollections it occurred to

me how incredibly unlikely it was that the Palm Beach killing took place at all; it is an anomaly that *I cannot explain outside of divine intervention.* (Italics added.)

There is only one explanation for why these five young men died and left a legacy that has inspired thousands. God intervened. This is the kind of sovereignty we mean when we say no one, absolutely no one, can frustrate the designs of God to fulfill his missionary plans for the nations. In the darkest moments of our pain, God is hiding his explosives behind enemy lines. Everything that happens in history will serve this purpose as expressed in Psalm 86:9,

All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

CONVICTION #6—ONLY IN GOD WILL OUR SOULS BE AT REST.

The one trans-cultural reality that unites every person of every culture is that God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:12). Every person has been created in the image of God and has the stamp of God on his innermost being. In our alienation from God there is a void that the nations try to fill in a multitude of God-less ways, but always come up empty. Only God can satisfy the soul with the depth and endurance of joy that we crave for. Thus the loving pursuit of missions is the glory of God in the eternal joy of the redeemed.

CONVICTION #7—DOMESTIC MINISTRIES ARE THE GOAL OF FRONTIER MISSIONS.

This conviction addresses the tension that develops in a mission-driven church between those who have a passion for ministering here to our own desperately needy culture, and the radical advocates of taking the gospel where they don't even have access to the Source of any ministry at all.

By domestic ministries I mean all the ministries that we should do among the people in our own culture. For example, ministries relating to evangelism, poverty, medical care, unemployment, hunger, abortion, crisis pregnancy, runaway kids, pornography, family disintegration, child abuse,

divorce, hygiene, education at all levels, drug abuse and alcoholism, environmental concerns, terrorism, prison reform, moral abuses in the media and business and politics, etc., etc.

Frontier missions, on the other hand, is the effort of the church to penetrate an unreached people group with the gospel and establish there an ongoing, indigenous, ministering church.

Now stop and think about that. What this means is that frontier missions is the exportation of the possibility and practice of domestic ministries in the name of Jesus to unreached people groups.

Why should there be tension between these two groups of people? The frontier people honor the domestic people by agreeing that their work is worth exporting. The domestic people honor the frontier people by insisting that what they export is worth doing here. A crucial training ground for frontier missions is on the home front engaging in domestic ministries.

CONVICTION #8—THE MISSIONARY TASK IS FOCUSED ON PEOPLES, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE, AND IS THEREFORE FINISHABLE.

Many of us used to have the vague notion that missions was simply winning to Christ as many individuals as possible in other places. But now we have come to see that the unique task of missions, as opposed to evangelism, is to plant the church among people groups where it doesn't exist.

Revelation 5:9 is a picture of how Christ's death relates to missions: "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals for thou wast slain and didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." When the church has been planted in all the people groups of the earth, and the elect have been gathered in from all the "tribes and tongues and nations," then the Great Commission will be complete. Missions will be over.

The task of missions is planting the church among all the peoples, not necessarily winning all the people.

CONVICTION #9—THE NEED OF THE HOUR IS FOR THOUSANDS OF NEW PAUL-TYPE MISSIONARIES, A FACT WHICH IS SOMETIMES OBSCURED BY THE QUANTITY OF TIMOTHY-TYPE MISSIONARIES.

Timothy left Lystra, his hometown (Acts 16:1), and became a church

worker (a Timothy-type missionary) in a foreign place, Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), which had its own elders (Acts 20:17) and outreach (Acts 19:10). This is the model of a Timothy-type missionary: going far away to do Christian work where the church is fairly well established. It has biblical precedent and it is a good thing to do, if God calls you.

But that's not what Paul was called to do. His passion was to make God's name known in all the unreached peoples of the world. He said that he made it his ambition "to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named" (Romans 15:20). One of the most stunning things Paul ever said is in Romans 15:19, 23: "From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fulfilled the gospel of Christ...I no longer have any room for work in these regions." This stunned me, when I finally saw its implications.

No room for work between Jerusalem and northern Greece! His work there is done in spite of all the unbelievers that remain! He is now moving on to Spain. How could he say this? The answer is that he was a frontier missionary, not just a cross-cultural missionary. He was called to reach the unreached peoples, where there is no church to evangelize its own people.

What most Christians don't know today is that there are probably ten times more Timothy-type missionaries in the world than there are Paul-type missionaries. And yet there are still thousands of people groups—especially Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and tribal peoples—who have no access to a gospel-preaching church in their own culture.

Patrick Johnstone and others published in late 1996 a book entitled *The Unreached Peoples* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1996). In it the 2000 least-reached people groups are listed on pages 102–111. This gives you an idea of the remaining urgent need for missionaries who are willing to cross language and culture for the fame of Christ and the salvation of the perishing.

Therefore, our prayer for Bethlehem is that we put a very high priority on raising up and sending frontier missionaries—Paul-type missionaries. Not that we diminish the sacrifice and preciousness of the Timothy-type missionaries, but that we realize what the utterly critical, uniquely missionary need is in the world, namely, there are thousands of people groups with no access to the saving knowledge of Jesus.

Only Paul-type missionaries can reach them. That must be a huge

priority for us. Without the gospel everything is in vain. A crucial role that the Timothy-type missionaries play is to raise up Paul-type missionaries among the peoples with whom they are working.

CONVICTION #10—IT IS THE JOYFUL DUTY AND THE AWESOME PRIVILEGE OF EVERY LOCAL CHURCH TO SEND OUT MISSIONARIES “IN A MANNER WORTHY OF GOD” (3 JOHN 6).

But before we can send them, we must grow them or identify the ones who have been “grown” elsewhere but whom God is calling us to send. According to 3 John 7–8 there is a biblical mandate that we ought to support missionaries—a certain kind of missionary—one who has gone out “for the sake of the name.” “For they went out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth.”

There is a big difference between a church that “has” missionaries (on the back of their bulletin or as a line item in their budget) and a church that “sends” missionaries.

To send in a manner worthy of God is to so recognize the supreme importance of proclaiming the name of God in word and deed among the nations that we will do whatever we can to support those who go out for the sake of the name—spiritually, practically, emotionally, financially.

CONVICTION #11—WE ARE CALLED TO A WARTIME LIFESTYLE FOR THE SAKE OF GOING AND SENDING.

To send in a manner worthy of God and to go for the sake of the name, we must constantly fight the deception that we are living in peace time where we think that the luxury of self-indulgence is the only power that can break the boredom. O may God open our eyes to what is at stake in the war raging between heaven and hell.

The spirit of the great missionary, Paul, must grip us more and more. “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

In wartime everything changes. The luxury liner, *Queen Mary*, became a troop carrier, and instead of bunks three high they were stacked seven

high. Resources are allocated differently in wartime. And we are in a war far more devastating than World War II.

A wartime lifestyle presents itself not as a legalistic burden, but as a joyful acknowledgment that our resources aren't entrusted to us for our own private pleasure but for the greater pleasure of stewarding them for the advancement of the kingdom of God (Acts 20:35; Matthew 6:33).

CONVICTION #12—PRAYER IS A WARTIME WALKIE-TALKIE NOT A DOMESTIC INTERCOM.

In wartime prayer takes on a different significance. It becomes a wartime walkie-talkie and no longer a domestic intercom. Jesus said to his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, in order that whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give to you” (John 15:16).

Notice the amazing logic of this verse. He gave them a mission “in order that” the Father would have prayers to answer. This means that prayer is for mission. It is designed to advance the kingdom. That's why the Lord's Prayer begins by asking God to see to it that his name be hallowed and that his kingdom come.

James warned about the misuse of prayer as a domestic intercom to call the butler for another pillow. He said, “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:2–3).

Prayer is always kingdom oriented. Even when we pray for healing and for help, it is that the kingdom purposes of God in the world may advance. Otherwise we have turned a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom.

Let us pray with the apostle Paul, “that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified” (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

CONVICTION #13—OUR AIM IS NOT TO PERSUADE EVERYONE TO BECOME A MISSIONARY, BUT TO HELP EVERYONE BECOME A WORLD CHRISTIAN.

As we said earlier, there are only three kinds of people: goers, senders, and

the disobedient. It's not God's will for everyone to be a "goer." Only some are called to go out for the sake of the name to a foreign culture (e.g., Mark 5:18–19).

Those who are not called to go out for the sake of the name are called to stay for the sake of the name, to be salt and light right where God has placed them, and to join others in sending those who are called to be cross-cultural missionaries.

In God's eyes both the goers and the senders are crucial. There are no first and second class Christians in God's hierarchy of values. Together the goers and the senders are "fellow-workers with the truth" (3 John 8).

So whether you are a goer or a sender is a secondary issue. That your heart beats with God's in his pursuit of worshipers from every tribe and tongue and people and nation is the primary issue. This is what it means to be a World Christian.

CONVICTION #14—GOD IS MOST GLORIFIED IN US WHEN WE ARE MOST SATISFIED IN HIM; AND OUR SATISFACTION IN HIM IS GREATEST WHEN IT EXPANDS TO EMBRACE OTHERS—EVEN WHEN THIS INVOLVES SUFFERING.

It is amazing how those who have suffered most in the missionary cause speak in the most lavish terms of the blessing and the joy of it all.

Start with Jesus: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34–35).

We save our lives by giving them away in the cause of the gospel. This is what Paul meant when he said, "This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). And, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).

According to Paul suffering "completes what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ" (Colossians 1:24). This is the way that the Great Commission will be completed. To suffer in this way means that our labors for the love of his name will include a personal presentation of his sufferings through our sufferings to those for whom he died.

Samuel Zwemer—after 50 years of missions labor (including the loss of two young children in North Africa)—said, “The sheer joy of it all comes back. Gladly would I do it all over again.” And both Hudson Taylor and David Livingstone, after lives of extraordinary hardship and loss, said, “I never made a sacrifice.”

When people who have suffered much speak like this, their God is magnified. If God can so satisfy their souls that even their sufferings are experienced as steps into deeper joy with him, then he must be far more wonderful than all that the earth has to offer. Psalm 63:3 must really be true: “The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life.”

A while back we had the opportunity to hear J. Oswald Sanders speak. His message touched deeply on suffering. He was 89 years old at the time and still traveling and speaking around the world. He had written a book a year since he turned 70! We mention that only to exult in the utter dedication of a life poured out for the gospel without thought of coasting in self-indulgence from 65 to the grave.

He told the story of an indigenous missionary who walked barefoot from village to village preaching the gospel in India. His hardships were many. After a long day of many miles and much discouragement he came to a certain village and tried to speak the gospel but was driven out of town and rejected. So he went to the edge of the village dejected and lay down under a tree and slept from exhaustion.

When he awoke, people were hovering over him, and the whole town was gathered around to hear him speak. The head man of the village explained that they came to look him over while he was sleeping. When they saw his blistered feet, they concluded that he must be a holy man, and that they had been evil to reject him. They were sorry and wanted to hear the message that he was willing to suffer so much to bring them.

So the evangelist filled up the afflictions of Jesus with his beautiful blistered feet.

* * *

These are our driving missions convictions at Bethlehem. If God opens your heart, you will see that there is no better way to live than in the wartime

lifestyle that maximizes all you are and all you have for the sake of finishing the Great Commission. Because in this way God is magnified, we are satisfied, and the nations are loved.

When it comes to world missions, there are only three kinds of Christians: zealous goers, zealous senders, and disobedient. Which will you be? Please join us in “spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.”

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