

God's Global Purpose

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Obviously our ultimate purpose in serving God in this world must be to align ourselves with *His* purpose for this world. I would suggest that God's purpose is summarized (among other places in Scripture) in Psalm 86:9:

All nations whom You have made
Shall come and worship before You, O Lord,
And they shall glorify Your name.

Here we read that God *made* the nations (or peoples); the clear implication is that He has every right to expect their worship, their glorification of Him as their Creator. But not only is this an *expectation*, but also a clear *prediction* that this *will* happen (see also Psalm 22:27-28). The thrust of history and of the Church and of missions is towards that day when a countless throng of worshipers "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revel. 5:9) will join the angelic host around the throne to exclaim, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever!" (5:13) Right now "missions exists because worship doesn't," but at that future point "missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever." [John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, p. 11]

This certainty is thankfully not dependent on our faithfulness or stamina—rather God condescends to use us in His global purpose of gathering worshipers to the glory of His name. May we never forget that the purpose *and* its completion are *God's* responsibility!

It is possible to be distracted from God in trying to serve God. Martha-like, we neglect the one thing needful, and soon begin to present God as busy and fretful. A.W. Tozer warned us about this: "We commonly represent God as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring salvation and peace to the world . . . Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of Almighty God." [Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 13]

Seeing worship as the ultimate purpose and end of the Church, and therefore of missions, is not special pleading for the superiority of one "department" in the church over all others. Worship in its broadest biblical understanding, as the totality of our response to the glory of God, is something much bigger than church music, than worship services, than the Church itself, than even this world. But worship must indeed be central to all of them, because it is central to God's purpose, as Psalm 86:9 clearly demonstrates.

Evangelism must ultimately be understood as an invitation to men and women to become worshipers of a great and glorious God through the redeeming work of His Son. The goal of evangelism is to quite simply to win more worshipers to glorify His name (because He is worthy of it, and because that was His purpose in making the nations and redeeming mankind). To the Apostle Paul, evangelism was also in itself an act of worship: "For God, whom I serve [or *worship*] in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of his Son, is my witness..." (Romans 1:9) Paul also considered it to be a spiritual offering of worship for him to present new Gentile converts to God. (Romans 15:16)

Church planting also needs to have worship (in its broadest sense) at its core—not just one of a list of church-sponsored activities, but a God-centered, vertical orientation to all of

church life and ministry. Planting a church, building up the body, reaching the lost—each of these vital pursuits has by definition a people-oriented, horizontal component, and thus are just means to a much greater end. The *glorifying of God's name* must always be before us as our explicit goal and purpose. Our ultimate focus must be not on human needs but on God's worthiness (which in turn will help us to see human needs from His perspective).

Likewise our entire lives and ministries should be seen as our offering of thanks and praise to God for all that He has done for us in Jesus Christ. Paul makes this clear in Romans 12:1, a pivotal New Testament verse on worship and the Christian life: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." We seek to serve the glory of God ("whether we eat or drink or whatever we do," 1 Corinthians 10:31) because of all that "the mercies of God" has shed upon us, because of "the richness of His grace, which He lavished upon us" (Ephesians 1:7-8). Any missions endeavor is thus properly an outflow of a grateful saved heart, or as John Piper puts it, "worship is the fuel of missions. . . . You can't commend what you don't cherish" [*Let the Nations Be Glad*, p.11].

Thus all service flows from the inside out, as Paul points out in Romans 1:9: "For God is my witness, whom I serve *with my spirit* in the gospel of his Son." Interestingly, Paul uses Old Testament priestly terminology, invested with a new spiritual and internal meaning, to describe his evangelistic ministry as he speaks of "the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable" (Romans 15:15-16). All worship is a *response* to God's prior revelation of His Person and His grace—even offering up converts, *new worshipers*, for His glory.

We so easily lose the big picture with all of the things that clamor for our attention and energy! May God help us, in the midst of the rigors and the pressures of life (whether on the mission field or wherever), to keep ever before us a sense of wonder at the greatness of His glory. May those whom we serve see in us that God quenches the thirst in our own souls—that they might want to drink deeply as well. May our ministries awaken in people a deeper hunger for making Him central in their lives—that more and more people might "come and worship before You, O Lord . . . and glorify Your name."