

# The Supremacy of God in Missions Through Worship

## "Missions exists because worship doesn't"

- by John Piper

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The Lord reigns; let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*" (*Psalms 97:1*). "Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise thee! Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy!*" (*Psalms 67:3-4*).

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations *be glad!*", who cannot say from the heart, "*I rejoice in the Lord...I will be glad and exalt in thee, I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High*" (*Psalms 104:34; 9:2*). Missions begins and ends in worship.

If the pursuit of *God's* glory is not ordered above the pursuit of *man's* good in the affection of the heart and the priorities of the church, *man* will not be well served and God will not be duly honored. I am not pleading for the diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God's true worth, the light of missions will shine to the most remote peoples on earth. And I long for that day to come!

Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to "declare his glory among the nations". *Psalms 6:3*. Even outsiders feel the disparity between the boldness of our claims upon the nations and the blandness of our engagement with God.

### Albert Einstein's Indictment

For example, Charles Misner, a scientific specialist in general relativity theory, expressed Albert Einstein's skepticism over the church with words that should waken us to the shallowness of our experience with God in worship.

"The design of the universe...is very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. *He must have looked at what the preacher said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had every imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing.* My guess is that he simply felt that religions he'd run across did not have proper respect...for the author of the universe."

The charge of blasphemy is loaded. The point is to pack a wallop behind the charge that in our worship services God simply doesn't come through for who he is. He is unwittingly belittled. For those who are stunned by the indescribable magnitude of what God has made, not to mention the infinite greatness of the One who made it, the steady diet on Sunday morning of practical "how to's" and psychological soothing and relational therapy and tactical planning seem dramatically out of touch with Reality – the God of overwhelming greatness.

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 peace and salvation to the world. ... Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of Almighty God."

Scientists know that light travels at the speed of 5.87 trillion miles in a year. They also know that the galaxy of which our solar system is a part is about 100,000 light-years in diameter – about five hundred eighty seven thousand trillion miles. It is one of about a million such galaxies in the optical range of our most powerful telescopes. In our galaxy there are about 100 billion stars. The sun is one of them, a modest star

burning at about 6,000 degrees Centigrade on the surface, and traveling in an orbit at 155 miles per second, which means it will take about 200 million years to complete a revolution around the galaxy.

Scientists know these things and are awed by them. And they say, "If there is a personal God, as the Christians say, who spoke this universe into being, then there is a certain respect and reverence and wonder and dread that would have to come through when we talk about him and when we worship him."

We who believe the Bible know this even better than the scientists because we have heard something even more amazing:

"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?" says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these (stars)? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing. (Isaiah 40:25-26)

Every one of the billions of stars in the universe is there by God's specific appointment. He knows their number. And, most astonishing of all, he knows them by name. They do his bidding as his personal agents. When we feel the weight of this grandeur in the heavens, we have only touched the hem of his garment. "Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways! And how small a whisper do we hear of him" (Job 26-14). That is why we cry 'Be exalted, O God, Above the heavens!' (Psalm 57:5). God is the absolute reality that everyone in the universe must come to terms with. Everything depends utterly on his will. All other realities compare to him like a raindrop compares to the ocean, or like an anthill compares to Mt. Everest. To ignore him or belittle him is unintelligible and suicidal folly. How shall one ever be the emissary of this great God who has not trembled before him with joyful wonder?

### **The Second Greatest Activity in the World**

The most crucial issue in missions is the centrality of God in the life of the church. Where people are not stunned by the greatness of God, how can they be sent with the ringing message, "*Great* is the Lord and *greatly* to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods!" (Psalm 96:4)? Missions is not first and ultimate: God is. And these are not just words. This truth is the lifeblood of missionary inspiration and endurance. William Carey, the father of modern missions, who set sail for India from England in 1793, expressed the connection:

"When I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and His Word is true. Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse; though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph."

Carey and thousands like him have been moved by the vision of a great and triumphant God. That vision must come first. Savoring it in worship precedes spreading it in missions. All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is not that goal. It is the means. And for that reason it is the second greatest human activity in the world.

### **God's Passion for God Is the Foundation for Ours**

One of the things God uses to make this truth take hold of a person and a church is the stunning realization that it is also true for God himself. Missions is not God's ultimate goal, worship is. And when this sinks into a person's heart everything changes. The world is often turned on its head. And everything looks different – including the missionary enterprise.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his own heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and great commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the glory of his manifold perfections. The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is that God's passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the goal in missions is that worship is God's goal. We are confirmed in this goal by the Biblical record of God's relentless pursuit of praise among the nations. "Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!" (Psalm 117:1). If it is God's goal it must be our goal.

## The Chief End of God Is to Glorify God and Enjoy Himself For Ever

All my years of preaching and teaching on the supremacy of God in the heart of God have proved that this truth hits most people like a truck laden with unknown fruit. If they survive the impact, they discover that it is the most luscious fruit on the planet. I have unpacked this truth with lengthy arguments in other places. So here I will just give a brief overview of the Biblical basis. What I am claiming is that the answer to the first question of the Westminster Catechism is the same when asked concerning God as it is when asked concerning man. Question: "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever." Question: "What is the chief end of God?" Answer: "The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy himself for ever."

Another way to say it is simply, God is righteous. The opposite of righteousness is to value and enjoy what is not truly valuable or rewarding. This is why people are called righteous in Romans 1:18. They suppress the truth of God's value and exchange God for created things. They belittle God and discredit his worth. Righteousness is the opposite. It means recognizing true value for what it is and esteeming it and enjoying it in proportion to its true worth. The unrighteous in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 perish because they refuse to love the truth. The righteous, then are those who welcome a *love* for the truth. Righteousness is recognizing and welcoming and loving and upholding what is truly valuable. God is righteous. This means that he recognizes, welcomes, loves and upholds with infinite jealousy and energy what is infinitely valuable, namely, the worth of God. God's righteousness passion and delight is to display and uphold his infinitely valuable glory. This is not a vague theological conjecture. It flows inevitably from dozens of Biblical texts that show God in the relentless pursuit of praise and honor from creation to consummation.

Probably no text in the Bible reveals the passion of God for his own glory more clearly and bluntly than Isaiah 48:9-11 where God says, "*For my name's sake* I defer my anger, *for the sake of my praise* I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for hoe should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.*"

I have found that for many people these words come like six hammer blows to a man-centered way of looking at the world:

For *my* name's sake!  
For the sake of *my* praise!  
For *my* own sake!  
For *my* own sake!  
How should *my* name be profaned?  
*My* glory I will not give to another!