

A Pastor's Role in World Missions

The way a pastor sees his role in relation to world missions will depend on his vision of God and his view of man. And these in turn depend primarily upon his grasp of Scripture and secondarily upon his awareness of our contemporary global situation.

So what I would like to try to do this morning is present the vision of God and the view of man that the Scriptures have thrust upon me, and then spell out some of the implications for world missions and the pastor's role in it.

A Vision of God

The vision of God in the Bible is of an absolutely sovereign, infinitely wise God. Because of His limitless power and knowledge, He is completely self-sufficient and all-sufficient, that is, He has no deficiencies which need to be supplied by anything outside Himself. Therefore nothing that He does is motivated by a desire to meet His needs. Instead everything He does is motivated by the desire to display His fullness. In other words, the chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself for ever.

This is evident if we take a brief overview of God's purposes at the various turning points in redemptive history.

Why did God create us? Isaiah 43:6-7, *"Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth (says the Lord), everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory."*

Why did God choose a people for Himself and make Israel His possession? Jeremiah 13:11, *"I made the whole house of Israel ... cling to me, says the Lord, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise and a glory."*

Why did God rescue them from bondage in Egypt? Psalm 106:7-8, *"Our fathers when they were in Egypt did not consider thy wonderful works ... but rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet He saved them for His name's sake that He might make known His mighty power."*

Why did God spare them again and again in the wilderness? Ezekiel 20:14, *"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."*

Why didn't God cast away His people when they rejected Him as king and asked for a king like the nations? 1 Samuel 12:20-22, *"Fear not, you have done all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord ... For the Lord will not cast away His people*

for His great name's sake."

Why did God use His sovereign power to bring back His people from exile after punishing them for generations of sin? Isaiah (48:9,11) put it like this, *"For my name's sake I defer my anger, for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you ... For my own sake, for my own sake I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."*

Ezekiel (36:22-23, 32) put it like this, *"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 ... And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name ... and the nations will know that I am the Lord. It is not for your sake that I will act says the Lord God. Let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel."*

Why did the Son of God come to earth and to His final decisive hour? John 17:1, *"Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the son may glorify thee."* A beautiful conspiracy to glorify the Godhead in all the work of redemption!

And why will Jesus come again in the great day of consummation? 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10, *"Those who do not obey the gospel will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion 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 in all who have believed ..."*

Unless we take our starting point from the sovereign majesty of God and His ultimate allegiance to His own glory above all else, our missionary theology and strategy and motivation will become man-centered and will in the end degenerate into a powerless sentimentality.

God does everything He does in creation and redemption for His own glory. Therefore, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, that is, to glorify God by enjoying Him for ever. We cannot add to God's glory. We can only reflect its value by enjoying it, adoring it, praising it, worshipping it, and being so satisfied by it that our hearts are guarded from other attractions.

The reason man was created in the beginning and the reason the church is being recreated in the end is for the worship of God. Missions therefore is neither God's primary end nor the primary end of the church. It is a means to the primary end of worship. Missions exists because worship doesn't.

There will be no missions in the age to come. Worship will be our life. Missions is not our ultimate goal. It is a means to our goal.

We cut off the power of the cause of missions when we give it a place in our churches and in our hearts that belongs only to worship. If the pursuit of man's good is not ordered below the church and the affections of the heart, man will not be well served and God will not be honored.

A VIEW OF MAN

We have already touched on the view of man that forms the counterpart to this vision of God in the Bible. Man by nature does not have a heart to glorify God. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). In our wickedness we suppress the truth that God is our Sovereign and is worthy of all our allegiance and affection. By nature we exchange the glory of the immortal God for dim images of it in creation (Rom. 1:18,23).

As Paul says in Ephesians 4:18, the nations *"are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."* By nature we were all once dead in trespasses and sins following the slavemaster of Satan, and therefore children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). Our end was "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46), *"exclusion from the presence of the Lord's glory"* (2 Thess. 1:9), and endless torments in *"the second death which is the lake of fire"* (Rev. 14:11; 20:10; 21:8).

The infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of the glory of God. The Biblical assumption of the justice of Hell is the clearest testimony to the infiniteness of the sin of failing to glorify God. All of us have failed. All the nations have failed. Therefore the weight of infinite guilt rests on every human head because of our failure to delight in God more than we delight in our own self-sufficiency.

In summary, then, the vision of God in Scripture is of a majestic and Sovereign God who does all things for the sake of His own glory. And the view of man in Scripture is that we suppress this truth and by nature find more joy in our own glory than we do in God's.

THE PLACE OF WORLD MISSIONS

Which leads us to the meaning of world missions. World missions is God's strategy for calling out of every tribe and tongue and nation a chosen people for the praise of the glory of His grace. The incarnation of Christ

not only has much to teach us about missionary methods but also about God's aim as a missionary. Romans 15:8-9 says, "Christ became a servant to the circumcised ... in order that the nations might glorify God for His mercy."

Therefore the end and goal of world missions is that the nations might glorify God for His mercy. The aim of missions is worship. Missions exists because worship doesn't. The gap between God's goal to glorify Himself in all that He does and the world of unbelief that denies Him that glory is being closed by God through the means of world missions.

And He will close it. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). The foundation of this certainty is God's unconditional election and the sovereignty of grace in the conversion of sinners through the worldwide preaching of the Gospel. The sure hope of success in world missions is the power of God to see to it that His sheep in every tongue and tribe and nation will give heed to the word of His missionary shepherds.

Jesus described the missionary task remaining like this: "I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also and they will heed my voice" (John 10:16). The success of their in-gathering is certain. He said that the reason some don't believe the missionary proclamation of the gospel is that they do not belong to His sheep. But "my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me" (10:26-27; cf. 8:47; 18:37). So the remaining missionary task as Jesus conceived it was "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (11:52).

So, for example, when the missionary Paul enters the pagan city of Corinth the Lord assures him in a dream, "Do not be afraid but speak and do not be silent; ... for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). And when he finishes preaching in the city of Antioch, Luke describes the results like this, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). And how did these sheep, who were dead in trespasses and sin, give heed to the master's voice? Luke gives us Lydia as an example of the power of grace in the preaching of the gospel: "The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14).

The ultimate success of the cause of world missions rests on the great realities of unconditional election and the sovereignty of grace in the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, it is certain that one day there will be "a great multitude which no man can

number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb ... crying with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev. 7:9-10). They will fill the new heavens and the new earth with the white hot affection of their praise, and the goal of God in creation and redemption will be achieved.

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR

What then should a pastor do to promote a passion among his people to see God glorified by the in-gathering of his sheep from the thousands of unreached people groups around the world?

My answer: above everything else, be the kind of person and the kind of preacher whose theme and passion is the majesty of God. No church will be able to rise to the magnificence of the missionary cause of Christ if they do not feel the magnificence of Christ Himself. There will be no big world vision without a big God. There will be no passion to draw others, near or far, into the joy of our worship where there is no passionate joy in worship.

The most important thing I think pastors can do to arouse and sustain a passion for world evangelization is week in and week out to help their people see the crags and peaks and icy cliffs and snowcapped heights of God's majestic character. And let me sharpen the point in two ways.

1. I mean that we should labor in our preaching to clear the mists and fog away from the sharp contours of the character of God. We should let Him be seen in His majesty and sovereignty.

I know of one denominational official who, when asked how to preach on texts that seem strong on predestination or election or the sovereignty of grace, said something like, "O, I think you can preach on those texts without letting people know what you think. It's possible to be sufficiently imprecise so that you don't upset people."

That attitude toward doctrine and preaching is the source of widespread weakness and shallowness in our churches. It is a tragedy when we believe that we are serving the cause of God by surrounding the peaks of His glory with a fog of ambiguity. If our people are ever going to have a global faith and a global vision we are going to have to stop hiding from them the Biblical proportions of the majesty of God.

2. The second way I would want to sharpen the point is to say that the majestic character of God needs to be seen week in

and week out not in the context of casualness and triviality and Sunday morning slapstick, but in the context of exaltation and awe and solemnity and earnestness and intensity.

How will our people ever come to feel in their bones the awful magnitude of what is at stake in the eternal destiny of the unevangelized, if our homiletical maxim is to start with a joke and keep the people entertained with anecdotes along the way. How will the people ever come to know and feel the crags and peaks and snowcapped heights of God's glory if our preaching and worship services are more like picnics in the valley than thunder on the ice face of Mt. Everest?

That's the most important thing as I see it for arousing and sustaining a passion for the glory of God in world evangelization—week in and week out to help them see the majesty of the glory of God.

by John Piper

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Website: www.desiringGod.org.
Email: mail@desiringGod.org.
Toll Free: 888.346.4700.