



Digging

Deeper

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The Task and Motive of Missions

By John Piper

Now, let me try to put the context around what I'm going to say in a few minutes by telling you what drives me to go out and speak to groups like this and leave my church and take time away from my family and talk. And it's a vision I have in my mind of the end of the age. And I take it from Matthew 24. This isn't the text I'm going to spend most of my time on, but it's a preliminary text that has fired me up over the last several years to think about what I'm doing in a certain context, especially as the Lord's words apply to the end of the age.

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

So, he's just promising his disciples they're going to be hated by all nations, that all the nations (panta ta ethnē, which occurs in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19: "Go . . . and make disciples of all nations") and when you get there, they're going to hate you. Not all of them, not all of them, but some. So, there'll always be a division in the house. Wherever you go, some will hate, some believe, and so don't be startled, and don't be stunned. So, in that context, we move on to Matthew 24:12:

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Now, this word on coldness scares me. See that? Wickedness is multiplied. Most men's love will grow cold. So, this world's going to end with a coldness. I picture a glacier. There's this glacier, this spiritual glacier moving over the world, coming from, of all places, hell. Do you know there are glaciers in hell? It's moving over the world and it's freezing people's love for God. It's freezing people's affections for the Bible and for the truth and for Christ and for his mission. And their hearts are just going into icicles, and church is boring and everything is boring, and the only thing that's hot is sex and booze and money.

Torching the Glacier

Now, you might get really pessimistic. If you didn't notice, in verse 14 the almighty Christ says that "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." No if, ands, or buts. Not "If I can just get the church to be obedient, or "If I can

Matthew 24:9, where we started. They're going to deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death, and you'll be hated by all these nations. So, you've got nations out there ready to hate you, they need the gospel desperately, you got an almighty Christ saying, "My church is going to reach those people. Every single tribe, tongue, and nation is going to be penetrated. It's going to cost some of them their lives. Every place they go, they're going to encounter opposition." I conclude it is not cold people who are going to be doing that; it's going to be red-hot people – people who, in the midst of the glacier, are blazing in here for the love of Jesus, because it's going to cost them their lives. It's going to cost them leaving a lot behind.

So, you got two things happening at the end of the world, and this gets me really encouraged and banishes my pessimism out of the world. You've got icy people, because the glacier is moving over churches and nations and educational institutions and the arts and business and media, and the glacier is just coming over, freezing people out for God. But somewhere, God has got him a remnant of white-hot people, and they're the ones who are going to fulfill Matthew 24:14. What I'm doing here is giving you a context for what I'm doing here tonight. I picture my ministry at my church in Minneapolis, and I picture myself every time I go out to a group like this as going with a torch in my hand – this book mainly, and the truth of God in it – and I'm torching the glacier wherever I go.

My goal tonight is if any of you are feeling frozen out by this glacier – you've seen it on television, you've read it in books, you just feel it all around you that people are being frozen out from heaven, frozen out from spiritual things, frozen out from God. And you're starting to be drawn into it and feel in your own heart a kind of shriveling up and lukewarmness. I'm here tonight to put my torch in your faith and light you on fire for God again, and to give you a picture of what missions and the global God of missions is all about. That's my agenda tonight: I want to torch the glacier in this little part of the world. And wherever I go, I just want to let the little flame that I feel when I put my face in this Book come for you tonight.

The Church's Ultimate Goal

You've already heard the note struck from Brad that the main issue is not mission. So, I would put it like this: the ultimate goal of the church is not missions; the ultimate goal of the church is worship, because God is ultimate – not man. Missions is penultimate, and worship is ultimate. A penultimate thing is a step below the ultimate. Worship is the ultimate thing, and missions is penultimate. Missions exists in the world because there are people and places where worship doesn't exist yet. And when this age is over, and God gathers his people from all the tongues and tribes and people and nations, and that trumpet sounds, and the angels gather the elect from the four winds, missions is over. There's not going to be any missions in heaven. There's not going to be any missions in the age to come. It is strictly a stop-gap measure in a world where there's so much lostness, and so many people perishing. But if you try to make it ultimate, something goes wrong in your heart.

I tried, as a college student at Wheaton, to make it ultimate. I didn't have my theology straight. I'd grown up in a church where I'd heard missions and I'd heard witnessing, and I'd heard do, do, do, and I never got the vision of a great and glorious God, who is an end in himself, and who had come into the world on a mission to get me, not for missions, but for him: to love him and to delight in him, to enjoy him, so that once I got ahold of that, missions became reasonable, it became fiery reasonable, that you would go out for God's sake to get people to him. You wouldn't recruit missionaries mainly; you'd recruit worshipers. So, that's the language we use at Bethlehem: missions is the business of gathering worshipers for all the peoples of the world.

So, missions is not the ultimate purpose of the church; worship is the ultimate purpose of the church, and missions is a tremendously high priority in the church because it's the means by which we gather

worshippers. Missions is the means by which the Holy Spirit extends the word of God and creates – out of rebellious, resistant hearts – worshipers of the living God who will do that forever and ever and ever and ever. And it will get better and better and better and better.

I remember as a little boy lying on the roof of my house. We had a spiral stairway that went up, and I would lie down at night on the roof of my house and tremble at what I saw in the sky. It was so big and so vast, and I would think of eternity because my parents were solid, fundamental Christian believers who taught me there's a hell and there's a heaven and Jesus is the dividing line. If you go with Jesus, you go to heaven; if you go against Jesus, you go to hell, and it lasts forever and ever and ever. And I would lie there and look at those stars, and I'd read a little bit about distances and time, and I thought, "This is scary. This is going to last a long, long, long time."

And you know, it wasn't hell mainly that I thought about; it was the fear that heaven would be boring. Did you ever feel that as a kid? "This is going to be so boring. It's going to last so long." And all the pictures I get of it of glassy seas and golden streets and angels, and harps." Like, "Oh, no, give me a ball." Well, I grew up and put behind me childish things. But it's going to be long and it's going to be glorious, and Jonathan Edwards has taught me that God is so great – the meaning of an infinite God is that you cannot exhaust the newness that you can find in him every day forever. Does that boggle your mind like it did mine when I first read it? There is newness to be known of an infinite God every day, forever, world without end. There will be no boredom in heaven – zero boredom, zero boredom in heaven. Count on God's infiniteness to provide freshness for every new day.

The Task of All Missions Work

The text I want to focus on tonight is Romans 15:8–9. And I'll try to give you a little outline of where we're going so you can follow, even though it might not always look like I'm on a straight line to get there. It's simple: there are two halves I'm going to look at. The first half is to describe the task of missions as the apostle Paul saw it, and then secondly, I'm going to describe the motive and goal of missions as he saw it from these two verses.

I tell you that Christ became a servant [incarnation] to the circumcised [Jews] 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.

Now, what I want to focus on first is that word nations or Gentiles. Jesus came into the world as a Jew so that the promises of God could be confirmed – so that he would be shown truthful – and so that the nations that hear the Jews coming to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, spills over the banks of Israel. That happened in Matthew 21:43, where it says, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits." And that's the church, gathered from all the nations.

Frontier Missions

Now, let's just talk about Paul's conception of the task for a moment. What is missions as a task? Not so much as a goal, but as a task? What do you do if you want to reach the goal that we've been talking about of gathering worshipers? If you read on in the following verses, it is remarkable what Paul does in the following context. He goes to the Old Testament and he fills his mouth, or his pen, with Old Testament references.

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."

And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." (Romans 15:9–11)

Now, notice that plural peoples. That's really important for me for one of the discoveries I made in the task of missions.

And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." (Romans 15:12)

Now there you have four quotations, one from Psalm 18, one from Deuteronomy 32, one from Psalm 117, and one from Isaiah 11. Now, this amazes me, because Paul probably had these memorized, these little proof texts from Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms, each one having the word nations in it. What does this say to you? Here's Paul, he's writing along in the book of Romans, and he says that Christ came into the world so that the nations would glorify God for his mercy, and he's got four Old Testament texts about the nations right there on the tip of his pen.

Where'd he get that? What that says to me is that Paul drew upon the Old Testament for the conception of missions that he had for himself. He drew upon the Old Testament in order to understand what the Old Testament meant. Now, let's go on a little farther down to Romans 15:18, and you'll see how that, in fact, is the case: this Old Testament conception that the nations, all the nations, would one day come to Christ – not necessarily every individual in every nation, but people from every nation is what drove Paul. Let's read verses Romans 15:18–21 so that you can see how this people-group thinking, this nation-thinking gripped Paul.

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."

Let's back up for a minute: Jerusalem to Illyricum. Illyricum is the province just in the north part of Greece over on to Italy. So, you've got Jerusalem coming up through Judea and Syria, across Turkey, Asia Minor, over through Greece, Macedonia, Achaia, and up almost to Italy. And do you believe this? He says, "I have completed the gospel in that area." He even goes so far as to say that "I have no more room to preach in this area." What on earth does that mean? We know that it does not mean everybody is won to Christ already in that area, because he's writing letters back to the churches that he's established in those areas encouraging them to be good witnesses, and he left Timothy behind in Ephesus to go on ministering the gospel so that all of Asia could go on being saved. But he says, "I have fulfilled the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum."

So, here's my conclusion from that. He's a missionary. I don't know how you use the word missions and missionary in your churches, but I want to encourage you to help us preserve the word for this. The church does many good things in many ways, and we shouldn't prioritize and say, "Well, going to Afghanistan is better than working in Prentice." That's not true. But let's preserve the word missionary for something unique – namely, what Paul does.

Paul said, "My calling is to preach the gospel among people groups where they've never heard the gospel, and when a church is planted there, I'm moving on." And he did it. He always moved on. The longest he stayed anywhere evidently was about almost three years in Ephesus, and he planted a church and moved on, and now he's heading for Spain at the end of his life. And he said, "I finished my work" – finished it. Not: "I made a good start," but "I finished." Well, how can you finish it if there's so many

people unsaved? And his answer is: "My job isn't to save everybody." That's not a missionary's job. A missionary's job is to plant the church where it doesn't exist.

Missionary Types

I sometimes use the phrase: you've got Paul-type missionaries, and you've got Timothy-type missionaries. A Paul-type missionary is a person who's bent on the frontiers, and he is pressing beyond where the church is planted and he's moving out to people groups, not individuals. There are individuals within ten miles of this place who are hell bound and need Christ desperately, and that's why we're here too. But a missionary doesn't say, "Oh, I've got to go to Prentice."

A missionary says, "I've got to find a people group among those newly open lands in the USSR, in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, and I've got to go to those people that are in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia and Iran where you can't go, and the people know nothing. They've got no church whatsoever. I've got to go to several hundred people groups in the northern part of India that have nothing. They don't have any church." That's a Paul-type missionary. There are a lot of Timothy-type missionaries. They go to places like Cameroon and teach in a seminary where the church has been for a hundred and fifty years, and they're valuable if they're trying to create Paul-type missionaries among the Cameroonians.

Let me put it positively: in your churches, pray that God would raise up some Paul-type missionaries whose dream would be going where the name has never been named, where there is no church yet in existence. If a person feels called to go to a place where the church has existed for a hundred and fifty years, bless them and send them. But pray and cultivate the other kind, because I have a feeling that we have a sense of contentment about ourselves, if a lot of our people are out there, not in America, when in fact, they're scarcely penetrating peoples who don't have the gospel at all.

Best Return on Investment

So, when people ask me – businessmen often do this kind of asking – "Is it a good investment to send people overseas when there's so many unbelievers here? You'd get more bang for your buck right here. You can speak the language, and there's a lot of lost people in Minneapolis, and so let's be efficient and save what we can save." Well, that just misses the point of missions. The point of missions is not to save as many individuals as you can; the point of missions is to penetrate every people group and save some among every people group, as many as you can. But until every one of those people groups is penetrated, missions isn't finished.

So, my word to any in my church who say to me, "Well, why should we spend \$25,000, \$30,000, \$50,000, or \$75,000 a year to send somebody to Kazakhstan when there's souls equally valuable in the Phillips neighborhood, south of where we minister?" The answer is that Jesus said, "Disciple the nations." The numbers vary a lot from ten to eleven thousand at the top end to two thousand at the bottom end, but there are thousands of peoples with no self-sustaining evangelizing church in the world now. The missionary mandate is to get to those peoples, even if they're the hardest people on the face of the earth, like many of the Muslim people.

I've got a friend who works with Frontiers. He's been in Tunisia for twelve years. He can count on one hand his converts. I can hear a lot of people say, "That's not a good use of money. That's not a good use of money." Baloney on money. The word is: Go to the people groups that don't have a church. You can count on two hands the number of Christians in Tunisia probably. I'm glad he's there. I'm glad he's there. I try to encourage him to press on and do the work.

Even if America Sinks

So, Timothy missionaries, God bless them. I hope that they are all mobilizing the churches of the third world to be Paul-type missionaries and to stretch and bend. One of the missionaries in the Baptist General Conference, who is at our church for a little while he's on furlough, that's his passion in the Philippines. The Philippines is a largely Christianized nation in many ways. Of courses, there's a lot of paganism and a lot of nominalism, but a lot of vibrancy too. But his goal in going to the Philippines, working with an established church in the Philippines, is to mobilize that church for missions because those people have a lot better access to some people groups than Americans do. One of the most exciting things in missions is the movement of third-world missions, not just third-world churches – the younger churches of the last forty years that have grown up in so many third-world countries – but third world missions.

I don't have the statistics with me, but there are hundreds and hundreds of missions agencies springing up in third-world peoples so that they can send, with their different colored skins, people all over the world. Korean missionaries and Japanese missionaries and Filipino missionaries will go places and do things American missionaries could never do. God is going to complete his mission to all the peoples, even if America sinks under the Atlantic Ocean. So many people wring their hands and say, "Oh, poor America. Their missionaries are coming home, they're retiring, we're not replacing them, and people are turning away from the Lord, and it's lukewarm, and there's such moral degeneracy." If the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean meet in the middle, and it's all over for America, God's going to finish his work, and he's going to finish it with people, and America will be put in its place.

I don't see any necessary role for America in God's timeline. I have no fancy dreams about America being the savior of the world. I hope that God will bless us, I hope that great revival will come, I hope that I'll be right in the thick of it and tooting my little horn, waving my little torch, and pushing the glacier back, but if it doesn't come, God reigns, and he will finish getting to all those peoples, and I just want to have a hand in it as long as he gives me life.

So, the first point is the task of missions. And the task of missions is not primarily to think in terms of individuals; that's the task of evangelism. The task of missions is to think in terms of people groups, so that you can go to a land like Albania, pour your life out there like the apostle Paul did for twenty, thirty, forty years, come to the end of your life and say, "We have finished the work of missions in Albania," and leave. And the church goes on doing the endless work of evangelism among the peoples of Albania. So the task of missions is people's being penetrated.

The Goal of All Missions Work

Now, let's go back to Romans 15:8-9 and talk just a little while about the motive and the goal of missions. I have three brief interlocking truths under this point of the motive and the goal.

1. Zeal for the glory of God is the motive of world missions.

Notice the phrases from which I get that truth. In verses 8-9, Paul says that Christ came: to show God's truthfulness, he came in order to confirm God's promises, and he came that the nations might glorify God for his mercy.

So, there are the three things from which I get this truth. Paul's was not the first missionary journey. Jesus's was the first missionary journey. Actually, it wasn't, because Jonah was also a missionary journey. But Jesus was the decisive one. And he came for three reasons. He came to show God's truthfulness, he came to confirm God's promises, and he came that God might be glorified among the nations.

So, I conclude the mission was driven by Jesus's zeal for the glory of God. "I want the truth of my Father to be known in the world. I want the truth of his promises to be believed in the world. I want the nations

to give glory to him for his mercy. I love my Father's glory, and I will manifest it in the world, and I will assemble around me a band of people who love my Father's glory and who will lay their lives down in the mission in order to make my Father's glory known. I don't want people to stop, to ignore my Father. I don't want them to bow down and worship wood and stone when my Father deserves their worship. I love my Father's glory." That's what's driving Jesus and the people he assembled around him.

Now, let me just illustrate this for you from a series of Old Testament texts because this is one of the most controversial things I say at my church and when I go out and speak – namely, that what is driving the mission of God is God's zeal for God, God's zeal for his own name, God's passion for his own glory, revealed in his Son, is what's driving the revelation of the gospel penetrating out. What fires God up and makes him indomitable in his mission to reach all the nations is his love for his glory. Let me illustrate that for you, because that is something that is not sounded as a note in a lot of churches. So, I'll take you on a little tour of the Old Testament to show you God's love and passion and zeal for God's glory throughout the whole Bible. I'll do a little ten-minute survey of the Bible here.

GOD CHOSE US FOR HIS GLORY.

Ephesians 1:4-6: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless . . . to the praise of his glorious grace." So you were chosen for the praise of the glory of God's grace.

GOD CREATED US FOR HIS GLORY.

Isaiah 43:6: "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." You were created for God's glory. That's why he brought you into being.

GOD CALLED ISRAEL FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE.

Isaiah 49:3 says, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

GOD RESCUED ISRAEL FROM EGYPT FOR HIS GLORY.

Why did God deliver his people out of Egypt and bring them across the Red Sea? Psalm 106:7 says, "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works . . . 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." The reason God rescued Israel out of Egypt is not because they deserved it, but because his name was at stake, according to Psalm 106.

GOD RAISED UP PHARAOH FOR THE FAME OF HIS NAME.

Why did he raise up Pharaoh? Have you ever asked yourself, Why ten plagues? Why ten; plagues? Why not two plagues? Why not go straight from blood in water to the slaying of the sons? I mean, make sure work of it; God can get these people out of Egypt. Why ten plagues? Romans 9:17 says, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'" God took ten plagues to do it so that there would be more glory for his name. More power manifest over different kinds of beings, flies, locusts, frogs, sunshine, and water.

GOD SPARED ISRAEL FOR HIS GLORY.

Why did he spare these rebellious people? They get into the wilderness, and I've been reading Exodus now. I am a pastor, and so I can empathize with Moses, and I've been writing down all the places where they murmur, murmur against Moses, murmur, murmur, murmur. This poor guy. He didn't sign on for this job, he didn't want this job, and God made him do it. No water, Moses' fault; no food, Moses' fault;

bitter water, Moses' fault; trapped at the sea, Moses' fault. They're crying against him, and he's crying to God.

Why did God tolerate such a people? Why didn't he just wipe them out and start over? He threatened to do that a couple of times. And the answer is given in Ezekiel 20:14: "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." God's name was at stake, that's why he saved them. Why didn't he cast them away when they asked for a king?

GOD PRESERVED ISRAEL FOR THE HONOR OF HIS NAME

Remember that story, where they come to Samuel and said, "We want to be like the other nations. Give us a king." And Samuel comes to God and says, "What am I going to do with these people? And God says, "They have rejected me, not you. Give them a king, go ahead. It'll be trouble city for the rest of their lives, but go ahead and give them a king." And so he comes and he tells them, "You have sinned against the Lord, but I'm going to give you a king." And they get real scared and they say, "Oh, intercede with us" (1 Samuel 8; 12:6-19)

And this is what Samuel says back to them in 1 Samuel 12:20: "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." I love that. Here we are, we've sinned, we deserve to be killed, we're trembling, and God says, "I'm not going to cast you away; for my name's sake, I'm not going to cast you away." So, you don't get a big head; you glorify me because I'm looking to the value of my name when I save you. We could go on and on.

GOD PUT CHRIST FORWARD TO DISPLAY GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I'll pass over these others in the Old Testament and come to the cross of Christ, which is the great central word. In Romans 3:25-6 it says, "God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. 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." Now, why did Jesus die on the cross according to this text? He had passed over sins.

Aeons of Sin

Whose sins had he passed over? Well, he passed over David's sins. David commits adultery, Nathan comes and says, "You're the man." David falls flat on his face and writes Psalm 51: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Make me clean." And Nathan says, "The Lord has taken away your sin" (2 Samuel 12:13). Just like that. That's crazy. That's absolutely unjust for God to do that. Any judge in Minneapolis, after a man had killed a husband, and lain with a wife, and the guy stands before the judge, and the judge says, "Well, we'll just let go this time," he'd be off the bench. I mean, there'd be an outcry. There would be absolute outrage in the city against that judge, and there should be an outrage against God if he does that kind of thing.

Of course, nobody feels that today because we think we're the center of the universe as human beings and nobody has a trouble with God being merciful to us. Of course, what else would he do? We deserve mercy. Nobody struggles with what Paul struggled with in Romans 3:25; namely, How can there be a just God in heaven who passes over sins? How can we worship a God who passes over sins, who just says to an adulterer and a murderer, "Your sin is taken away?" Just like that. How can that be? I mean, if that doesn't bother you, if the passing over sin does not make you struggle with the justice of God, you will never love the cross.

The cross, the death of the Son of God is to get God off the hook. Christ died for God's glory. Christ died because the glory of God's righteousness was being trampled by David and you and me and everybody who's ever lived. We just grind God's glory. Every day that we don't love him with all of our hearts, we are falling short of the glory of God and grinding it into the ground, and thumbing our nose at him and blackballing him with our unbelief in his promises, and God is keeping us alive, making the sun go up every day on wicked cities like Minneapolis, giving me health, forgiving me day after day for all the irritable words I speak to my wife. How can there be justice in heaven? If that doesn't grip you, you will never understand the cross.

Let me read it again now. Can you hear it afresh maybe? "God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. 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." In other words, the meaning of the cross to God was: "That's how seriously I take your sin. I hate your sin. You belong in hell, and you would be there, but for that: he is bearing it all. My wrath is being poured out on him. He is honoring my righteousness and my glory."

So, the foundation of missions – the first great glorious God-sent mission – is driven by God's love for his righteous. "I will vindicate my righteousness in my son's death. Yes, I saved Abraham." Genesis 15:6 pictures this rascal Abraham – a moon-worshiper from Ur of the Chaldeans, and God mercifully just says, "Come on, you're mine." And he follows, and then he does all kinds of crazy things, like lying about his wife to save his own skin, lets her become a harem of a foreign king. And God says, "And Abraham believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Freely Justified

Don't you just love the doctrine of justification by faith? I love it with my life: that God just said, "I reckon you righteous because you've trusted me. Yes, you've fallen, but you've gotten up again and repented, and followed me, and put your faith in me. Yes, I've passed over that sin, I've passed over David's sin, I've passed over Elijah's sin. Elijah – what a jerk! In so many ways, he's up, he's down, he's all over the place, he's ready to leave God, wants to commit suicide. And God loves him, just passes right over his sin, forgives him all through the Old Testament, and the sin is mounting up, just mountains and mountains and mountains of forgiven sin. And we've got an unholy God in heaven if something doesn't happen here because you can't sweep sin under the rug of the universe and just say, "Oh, well, we'll let it go." You can't do that and have a holy, just God.

And here comes Jesus: "I am the solution to the problem of the universe." He says, "I know that there's a mountain of forgiven sin out there that's never been paid for, and if it doesn't get paid for, God is out of heaven and in hell. And I love my Father's glory, and he has never stopped loving his glory, though it looked like he treated those who offend his glory lightly, he didn't. He had in his mind, from before the foundation of the world, that there would one day be a price paid that would vindicate his glory unbelievably." And Christ is put forward on the cross to bear that mountain of sin, which is still being heaped up today in your lives. Tonight, before you go to bed, you're going to sin; it's going to be some attitude that's imperfect, your heart is going to fall, and you add to the mountain. And you ought to love the cross because of that. The cross is driven by God's love for God's glory.

So, the first prong of this truth at the end here is that missions is driven by a zeal for God's glory. I've got page after page of these texts, but I'm going to pass over and just go quickly to the second interlocking truth, and it's this, and this is what some of you right now are saying: What about John 3:16? Does he love us too?

2. A servant spirit and heart of mercy motivate world missions.

Romans 15:8-9 says "Christ became a servant . . . in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy." So, there's the word servant, he became a servant, and he wants the nations to glorify God for his mercy. Missions is the extending to the nations of the mercy of God sent through Jesus Christ.

So, add that to what I just said: that the first truth is that missions is driven by zeal for the glory of God, and the second truth is: missions is driven by a servant spirit and mercy. Jesus, when he saw the crowds, had mercy, compassion on them, and said, "They're like sheep without a shepherd. . . . therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:36, 38). So, that prayer for missions was driven by mercy.

So, I've got two truths before you now. I've got a God who is driven by his love for his glory, and I've got a God who is driven by mercy towards lost sinners. That's my second truth.

3. Glory and mercy meet in God.

Now, here's the third truth, and this is the last one: these two truths are one truth. That's my third truth. My third truth is that God's motive to be driven by his love for his glory – his love for his own name – and God's motive to be driven by mercy and the exhortation of his mercy are one truth.

Now, that's right here in Romans 15:8-9. You can see it if you look carefully. Because it says that Christ came via servant "in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy." Hold those together; don't separate them. You see the beauty of this? I love this. This is right at the heart of my theology, and what makes me tick and what gives me zeal for God: God's passion to be glorified among the nations is not to be glorified merely for his strength or for his intelligence or for his wisdom. The apex, the top of his glory, is his mercy. He wants to be glorified mainly for his mercy.

APEX OF GLORY

Picture a reservoir, and it's huge and it's a big dam and it's just been built and it's filling and people stand and they look at it. They say, "Wow, look at the size of this reservoir. Look at this." And day after day, week after week, the water is rising. They say, "Look at all that water. This is a huge amount of water." But what's the apex of the magnificence of the fullness of the reservoir? The apex is when it goes over the dam. You've got water flowing to make things grow and you've got light coming from the electricity. The point is this: the apex of the fullness of the glory of the sufficiency of the reservoir is the spillover. That's mercy. The mercy of God is the spillover of his riches to people. It's mercy because we don't deserve it; we can't help it happen. You can't pick up any water and say, "Oh, let me pour some water into God's reservoir," because any water you've got, you got from him; there's no adding to God.

And so this last point is this: God wants you to enjoy mercy. He wants you to wake up enjoying mercy, he wants you to go to bed enjoying mercy, he wants you to eat and drink mercy. He wants you to live on his mercy every day of your life. But you know what? Here's the most important sentence in my theology. It's in those books back there. God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him and his mercy. Which means that his desire for you to enjoy mercy and for his name to be glorified are not two separate desires in the heart of God; they're one.

And what drives missions is not really two things, but one thing. My desire in missions is that the nations might enjoy God's mercy, because in enjoying God's mercy, the value of that mercy is shown to be so great, it can satisfy the soul of tens of thousands of different kinds of people groups and people in the world. And therefore, God is getting the glory and they are getting the mercy.

GRACE TO US, GLORY TO GOD

That's what I said to our people when I welcomed them to worship this morning. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. " Why don't you want anyone to boast, God? Why are you doing it so that no one will boast? Answer: "Because I want you to boast in me." Boast in the Lord. So, I said to them, "You get the grace, God gets the glory." And that's the heartbeat of our lives. We get the grace, God gets the glory.

Charles Spurgeon, one of my favorite preachers, said, "I know for sure that this thing will not be overturned. If we would give much glory to God, we must get much grace from God." And so, feed on God, make God your ultimate goal, delight in his mercy, and he will rise in your heart as the treasure, so that you say with the apostle Paul, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). And when you become that kind of people and that kind of church, people are going to grow up in these churches and say, "I've got to spread this because God's going to have more glory, because my delight increases as more and more people come to share in my delight in God."

So, blessings on you brothers and sisters. Go back to your churches and just pray God down on your churches so that you fill up, and you – like him – begin to spill over in the work of evangelism here and in the work of missions among those peoples. Somebody in this room might do that, or some child born to somebody in this room, or somebody through your instrumentality might be the decisive person to crack a people group, which is one of the last ones maybe, before the Lord blows that trumpet.