

On Mission With Our Global God

The Motive of Missions (Psalm 96)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on February 15, 2015

Introduction

- ❖ When was the last time you had one of those lightbulb moments? When that lightbulb went off in your head. When you experienced that epiphany. That ah-ha moment. *Can you recall a time when you were confronted by a new truth that shaped for you a new perspective and offered you an entirely new reality to experience?*
 - ▶ Some of you are thinking about your conversion to Christ. That's been the biggest ah-ha, the greatest epiphany in your life. Some of you are thinking about that time you discovered you were good at that skill or passionate about that field of study – which explains why you're in that major or line of work. That was a big lightbulb for you.

- ❖ For me, many of my ah-ha, lightbulb moments have taken place while in a book. I would read a particular line or excerpt and have my mind blown. So for me, one of my biggest moments came in college when I read these words: ***“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.”***¹

- ❖ That's John Piper from his book *Let the Nations be Glad*. That's how he starts the whole thing off. Harvey Phillips quoted from the same excerpt last week. *“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't.”* **In other words the reason why we're here, why we exist, is to glorify God, to hallow his name.** And because we're so zealous for God to get all the glory, for his name to be hallowed above all names, that's why we're on a mission as a church to make God-loving, compassionate disciples of Christ among all nations.
 - ▶ It's because the worship due God – the worship he deserves from the lips of all the lost in our city and the lips of all the lost among the unreached peoples of the earth – because that worship is *not* happening, **that's why we're on a mission to make God-loving, compassionate worshippers of the one true God among all nations.**

- ❖ That was a paradigm shift for me. I always understood that Christians are left on this earth – instead of being transported up to heaven the moment we're saved – because we have a mission on earth. As a church, we have a Great Commission to fulfill. And that's why our mission statement is based on that. We were just talking the other day as a staff about how our mission statement just nails it. It's really hard to improve on it.
 - ▶ But if Piper's statement is a true, biblical statement, if missions is *not* the ultimate goal of the church, if worship *is*, then a little tweak to our mission statement would help clarify and remind us of that ultimate mission – which is to glorify God.

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, pg. 11.

- ❖ I'm not trying to officially modify our church's mission statement. But I got to thinking this week: If the ultimate mission of a church is the worship of God – which abides forever into heaven unlike the task of evangelism and missions – then we should more accurately say that Houston Chinese Church exists *to glorify God* (and on this side of heaven we do that) by making God-loving and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations.
- ❖ Now as we're in the heart of Missions Month, I hope God has been doing a work in you. Moving all of us to be more active and engaged in the task of missions. **But I'm also very concerned that our involvement is being driven by the right motives.** We can easily be guilty by a sense of duty. "I've always had access to the gospel. How I can keep the good news to myself when so many in the world without access? I *need* to do something."
 - ▶ Or you might be hearing all these stories and watching these videos of lost people with no hope, worshipping their idols, and your heart breaks for them. Out of compassion, you *want* to do something. You *want* to get involved.
- ❖ My concern is that those motives might get you moving. They might get you started. But will they keep you going? Will they sustain you till the end? Will you continue in active, engaged involvement in missions to the end of your days on earth?
 - ▶ **I believe only one motive has that power. That's having a passion for the glory of God. A zeal to see his name and his fame spread and exalted in all the earth.** This morning I want to unpack Psalm 96 because it's all about having that kind of passion.

Context & Structure of the Psalm

- ❖ It's helpful to know that Psalm 96 was written to celebrate King David's effort to bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. We read of that in **1 Chronicles 16:23-33**. There we find an almost identical version of Psalm 96 being sung as the ark was placed inside the tent of meeting.
 - ▶ That means this psalm was intended for corporate worship, to be sung as part of a grand ceremony celebrating the presence of God as he takes up residence in the midst of his people. **That explains why it appears to be giving instructions to worshippers. It sounds like a liturgy guiding us through a worship service.**
- ❖ Notice three instructions that divide the psalm into three section (vv1-6; vv7-9; vv10-13). In v1, we're instructed to **sing** certain things to God. Then in v7, we're told to **ascribe** certain things to him. And in v10, we're commanded to **say** certain things about him. The psalmist is functioning like a worship leader guiding the people of God as they worship around the ark.
 - ▶ **The remarkable thing is how this Yahweh-focused, Jerusalem-centric, stylistically-Jewish worship is so heavily missions-minded.** Notice how it's calling the nations/Gentiles to join in the song. In all three sections, there's a reference to *the nations* (vv3, 10), *the peoples* (vv3, 5, 7, 10, 13), or *the world* (vv10, 13).
 - I love how this psalm seamlessly connects a *passionate exclusive praise* of the one true God with a *passionate inclusive plea* to the nations to join in the song.

- ❖ **One criticism I often hear says that churches are putting too much emphasis on their worship services when we really should be focusing all that time and energy on missions.** We care too much about worship and not enough about the lost.
 - ▶ Well I hope you see that this is not an either/or choice we have to make. We make much of our worship services *because* we want to make much of God *in order that* the fate of the nations becomes a much greater burden on our hearts. Our missionary efforts will dry up and wither if we're not feeding that passion for the glory of God through worship. **If we want to be a church on fire for missions, we have to become a church on fire for the worship of God.**
 - Psalm 96 is aimed at doing just that. It's calling us to worship and then calling us to missions. It's calling us to three things – to a) See God's great glory, b) Sing of His great glory, and c) Go tell of His great glory.

See God's Great Glory

- ❖ **First, the psalmist is calling us to see God's great glory.** Before you can sing God's glory and tell others about his glory, you have to see it for yourself. You have to acknowledge that God is glorious. You have to attribute glory to God. Or to use the language of our text, you have to "*ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name*" (v8).
 - ▶ Did you notice that God is *due* glory? He *deserves* glory. You and I owe it to him. **We owe him glory. We owe him worship.** The psalm is calling us to recognize this. To see this. God is glorious and he deserves our praise.
- ❖ Notice the flow between vv3 and 4. In vv1-3 we have instructions to sing to the LORD three times. To bless his name. To tell of his salvation. To declare his glory among the nations.
 - ▶ Why? For what reason? Look at v4, "*For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised*". **God is great and deserves to be greatly praised.** That's the logic. That's why all the earth, all the nations, all the peoples ought to be singing his praise.
- ❖ Now specifically his glory and greatness are set in contrast to "*the gods of the peoples*" (v5). At the end of v4, it says the LORD is "*to be feared above all gods. ⁵For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.*"
 - ▶ The LORD (Yahweh) is to be feared and revered above all gods. Above Baal. Above Molech. Above Asherah. Above any of the Canaanite gods. Why? **It's not because the psalmist views Yahweh as simply the greatest or the most powerful among a pantheon of gods.** As a faithful monotheist, he knows Yahweh is the one true God.
 - All the gods of the peoples are *worthless idols*. Literally it says they're *nothings*. Nobodies. Nonentities. They don't exist.
- ❖ That's what's implied when v8 says to ascribe to Yahweh the glory due his name. That word *glory* is the Hebrew word *kabod*. It means weightiness or heaviness. **So to ascribe *kabod* to God is to acknowledge his weightiness. That he is substantive. While all the other gods of this world are fluff.** Nonentities. It's like they're all feathers while the LORD is a ton of bricks. They're a puddle. He's the Pacific Ocean. They're a candle flame. He's the sun.

- ❖ If you came across a people group deep in a vast desert who are praising this puddle as the largest and greatest body of water imaginable – wouldn't you want them to tell them about the Pacific? If there were a people group living deep in a bottomless cave who are praising a candle flame as the great light of all lights – wouldn't you want to tell them about the sun?
 - ▶ That's the same missionary impulse motivating the psalmist. **He wants to tell the peoples of the earth, who are fiddling with worthless (weightless) idols, about the glory (the weightiness) of the one true and living God.**

- ❖ That's the same impulse behind the prophet Isaiah. Turn with me to Isaiah 46. Here he makes reference to two of the chief gods of the Babylonians. *"¹Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. ²They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity."* (Isa. 46:1-2)
 - ▶ The point is: ***Why would you worship these gods who clearly can't save you?*** They can't carry your burdens. They themselves have to be carried. They're a burden themselves on the backs of weary beasts.

- ❖ Listen to what the LORD goes on to say in v3, *"³Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; ⁴even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."* (Isa. 46:3-4)
 - ▶ **When it comes to the gods of the nations, you have to carry them.** They're a burden for you to bear. But "listen to me", says the LORD, "I will carry you. I will bear your burdens. I will carry and I will save."

- ❖ **So the missionary impulse is really twofold.** Ultimately we're driven by a passion for God's glory. We want God to receive his due. We want his name, his fame, to spread throughout the earth. Because he deserves it. He's great and greatly to be praised. Secondly, behind that impulse to see God praised by all the peoples of the earth is the hope that a vision of such a glorious God will lead them to put aside their glory-less, helpless gods and find true rescue in knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (Jn. 17:3).
 - ▶ **The motive behind our missionary efforts is zealous passion for the glory of the LORD and genuine com-passion for the fate of the lost.** There's no conflict there.

- ❖ They're one and the same because both impulses are undergirded by a vision of great global God. We have a massive God who's too great, too glorious to only be appreciated and adored by one people group, even a hundred groups, even a thousand. No, God is so great that we won't rest until he is greatly praised by worshippers from every people group on the earth.
 - ▶ ***Is that your heart? Is that the heart of our church? Is that what's driving us?*** If not, if the missionary impulse is weak and waning in our own hearts or in the heart of our church, the problem is not just that we're lazy or self-seeking or callous to the lost.

- ❖ **Those are problems to be sure, but the underlying problem is that we've lost a vision for the great glory of God.** Our view of God is too small, too provincial, too domesticated. Apparently he's not all that great in our eyes, which is why we've come to tolerate the fact that he's not greatly praised among the nations. We readily accept that as the status quo. There are other peoples in the world who worship other gods. We just have to deal with it.

Sing of God's Great Glory

- ❖ No, that's not acceptable. That's not tolerable. If God is great and to be feared above all gods, then he deserves greatly to be praised and feared by all peoples. We've unwittingly accepted a smaller vision of God that conforms to the pluralistic sensibilities of society. But it's a vision that's drastically different than the great and glorious God revealed in Scripture.
 - ▶ ***So how do we recover a more biblical vision of God that restores our passion for his glory and a compassion for the lost who have never been told of this glory?*** The answer in this psalm is to sing.
- ❖ **Being able to see God's great glory is one thing. But to sing of his great glory from the depths of your soul is another matter.** That's when a vision is cast and the heart is moved. And singing – worshipping together with our voices – plays a significant part. Over and over this psalm calls us to sing. Three times in just the first two verses. And at the end it speaks of the trees of the forest singing for joy. Singing is so important to our missionary efforts.
- ❖ Again, this is why I don't get it when people try to pit a church's worship ministry against its outreach ministry. As if we're putting too much emphasis and energy on worship and not enough on evangelism or missions. I don't get that. We gather together on the Lord's day to unapologetically worship. **Because we're convinced that zealous, passionate worshippers of Jesus are the most zealous, com-passionate evangelists and missionaries for Jesus.**
 - ▶ If we want to strengthen our outreach, then when we gather as the church our central aim should be to worship God, to stir up affections for Jesus, to fan into flame a burning zeal for his glory to be spread to the ends of the earth. And a significant way of doing that is to sing. To use our voices to sing to the LORD.
- ❖ Now we've made it clear before that worship is *not* just singing. It's not helpful to use the term *worship* as synonymous for *singing*. It encompasses far more. But singing is an important form of worship, and that's why it's important to our missionary efforts.
 - ▶ **I know some of you don't like singing in church.** It's not your "thing". You're thing is the Word, listening to the Word bring explained and applied. Okay, let me explain and apply v1, "*Oh sing to the LORD a new song.*" That means you need to sing.
- ❖ **The Bible doesn't say you need to sing with a good voice.** It just commands you to sing. Singing to the LORD, singing about his salvation, about his marvelous works, about his righteous judgments – there's power in that to center your heart and mind on the great glory of God and to fill you with a passion to spread it.

- ❖ **Now obviously the sheer act of singing is not enough.** There are plenty of people who love to sing in church who care little about the glory of God. **What matters is *what you're singing and what you understand about what you're singing.***
 - ▶ I realize what you sing in church is not entirely up to you. That's the prerogative of our worship leaders – who, I assure you, are mindful of guiding us to sing in accordance with the truth about God and his great salvation. So what you sing on Sundays isn't necessarily up to you. But what you understand about what you sing is.
- ❖ ***Are you just mouthing the words or are you meditating on them? Are they just rolling off your tongue or are you burying these truths deep in your soul?*** When you sing, “*To God be the glory / Great things he hath done! / So loved He the world that He gave us His Son, / Who yielded His life an atonement for sin, / And opened the life-gate that all may go in.*” Are those just lyrics? Or is that the precious gospel that you're striking against your heart over and over until it sparks and kindles alive a burning passion for the glory of God and the spread of that glory among all nations?

Go Tell of God's Great Glory

- ❖ Sing to the LORD! And as your singing, be asking him to move in your heart, to stir up affections, to spark that flame. And if it's truly from the LORD it's going to spread like wildfire. Passionate worship is going to produce among us goers and senders who are passionate about the great task of global missions.
 - ▶ **Which leads to the third calling in this psalm: To go and tell of God's great glory.** After you've seen his glory with the eyes of your heart, after you've sung it deep into your soul, then you're primed and ready to go and tell the nations.
- ❖ As we mentioned earlier, **Psalm 96 is a very missions-minded psalm even though it was written for worship in a very Jerusalem-centered context.** There's a strong emphasis on inviting the nations, all the peoples of the earth, to come to Jerusalem, to come to the tent of meeting (or later to the temple), to come and see the glory of the LORD God.
- ❖ **Missions is *not* just a NT development.** Having a heart for the nations, wanting to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3), was engrained in Judaism from the beginning. But in the OT, missions definitely took on a more ***come-and-see* approach.**
 - ▶ You get a sense of this in our psalm. Did you notice the mention of seeing God's splendor and beauty “*in his sanctuary*” in v6? Or in v8. There's a noticeable come-and-see mentality towards the nations, “*bring an offering, and come into his courts!*”
- ❖ This all makes sense in the context of the OT where Yahweh made his dwelling specifically in Jerusalem. The glory of the LORD (*Shekinah*) rested in the Holy of Holies, the inner chamber room of the temple. **If the nations want to see the great glory of God, if they want to worship in the presence of God, they had to immerse themselves in Jewish culture, Jewish language, Jewish religious practices.** The nations have to come-and-see.

- ❖ But now when you enter the NT, the missionary impulse remains the same but the approach is totally different. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the hour is coming when the Father won't be worshipped on this or that mountain OR in this or that city, but rather true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:21-23). That's huge.
 - ▶ **The worship of the one true God is no longer centered in Jerusalem but in Jesus!** If you want to meet with God, if you want to worship him, you don't have to come to the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus is the new temple (Jn. 2:18-22). Jesus is the presence of God on earth. You go *to* him and *through* him to meet God, to worship God.

- ❖ What the Christian gospel effectively did was to detach the worship of God from one place, one culture, and one language. Which means Christian missions can no longer operate simply out of a *come-and-see* approach. **Now we're commissioned with a go-and-tell strategy.**
 - ▶ The whole design of Christian missions is *not* to invite the nations to come and see the way we worship God, to come and adopt our culture or our stylistic preferences. **It's *not* about telling other people groups to conform to our group.** No, missions is about going and telling all the peoples of the world the good news of what God has done through Jesus to redeem one people for himself, conforming us all to Christ.
 - Yes, there will always be an element of come-and-see in our gatherings when we worship corporately. But the primary impulse of all our outreach and missions is to go and tell the world that God is great and greatly to be praised.

- ❖ I think this is where we need to examine ourselves. "*Okay, so missions has transitioned from the Old to the New Testament from a primarily come-and-see approach to primarily go-and-tell. But have I (or have we as church) somehow reverted back? Are we depending too heavily on a come-and-see approach?*" Come and see my small group, my faith community. Come check out my church. Come and see how we love to worship, how we study the Bible, how we fellowship and pray for each other. Come and see.
 - ▶ But are we going and telling? Are we entering their world, their groups, their community? Are we learning their language and contextualizing to their culture and their stylistic preferences? Or have we gotten our strategies mixed up?

- ❖ **The Church has been commissioned with a go-and-tell mission.** And again, I believe every Christian has a role to play. I'm confident that some of you are actually called to go to the unreached peoples of the world and tell them about our God. Tell them that he's great and greatly to be praised. And the rest of us are called to go across the street and tell the same good news to our neighbors.
 - ▶ As we gather now as the church, may our love for God and our passion for his name increase, so that we scatter from this place into our city and throughout our world, with a burning passion to go and tell others to give God the great glory he is due!