

A Call to Christ-Centered Missions:
Missions Fueled by the Glory of Christ (Select Passages)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 5, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ Today we kick off Missions Month at our church. Our sermons this month will be on missions. The same with our Sunday School classes. Our small groups are sermon-based, so they'll be focused on missions as well. And this is happening on our Chinese side.
 - ▶ We don't do it very often and only for the topic of missions. So you might wonder why all the attention on this one topic. Why don't we set aside a whole month to focus on things like human trafficking? The global refugee crisis? Marriage or parenting? Those are all valuable topics and I'm sure we can talk about them for a month. **But the reason we only have a Missions Month is because of how close this issue lies to the heart of our church.**

- ❖ We exist to make God-loving, compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations. And it's the emphasis on "all nations" that really gets our blood pumping. **Missions is about making disciples among people different than ourselves – by crossing barriers that are geographic, geo-political, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural – to proclaim the good news of the gospel.** Of how God is reconciling sinners to himself through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son.
 - ▶ Our church values and affirms the goodness of ministries aimed at justice or at the strengthening marriages or families. **But we have a particular passion to promote and mobilize people for missions.**

- ❖ **This morning's message is my attempt to explain why.** Why do we care so much about missions? What's undergirding this particular passion? To put it simply, it's because of the glory of Christ. **The glory of Christ is what fuels Christian missions, and it's what compels us to focus so much time and energy talking about it.** And not just talking about it, but actually going and doing it!
 - ▶ This is why we chose the theme for Missions Month to be "*A Call to Christ-Centered Missions*". What I want to do is to a) first, define what we mean by Christ-centered missions, b) second, demonstrate that in missions we're serving a Christ-centered Christ, and c) third, apply a Christ-centered lens to the way we approach missions.
 - This morning I don't have just one text to exposit. We're stepping away from our normal practice of walking through a passage. That's the steady diet you'll get from this pulpit, but it's fitting to occasionally provide a survey of texts related a biblical theme like the glory of Christ as the fuel for global missions.

Defining Christ-Centered Missions

- ❖ So let's start by defining terms, by explaining what we mean by calling the kind of missions we want to promote as Christ-centered missions. What's up with that label? How are we distinguishing it from any other kind of missions? It really comes down to motivation.
 - ▶ That's why I titled this message: *Missions Fueled by the Glory of Christ*. **We're trying to identify the missionary impulse.** What not only sparks a fire for missions in our bones but what keeps it going and growing. What fuels our efforts? What does the task of missions revolve around? What's the ultimate, underlying motivation?

- ❖ It's important to identify our motivation because it's just a little too easy to drive you into doing something for missions by applying a heavy dose of guilt. By just appealing to your sense of duty or obligation. **You can call that guilt-centered missions. Missions fueled by our guilt or shame for not doing enough.**
 - ▶ We have so much access to the gospel. We've been so blessed with a church, with fellowship, with the Bible, with Bible teachers and preachers. We're suppose to be sharing these blessings, but we're just keeping it to ourselves. We're so selfish.
 - That can get us going. Guilt can move you to action. But for how long? It wont sustain. Eventually the heart will harden, the conscience will sear, and we'll find ways to rationalize our inaction. **Guilt-centered missions is a poor substitute that fizzles away too quickly.** And the problem is because it's so self-centered, so focused on my own feelings of guilt for not doing enough.

- ❖ A proper motivation requires us to first get outside of ourselves and to focus on others – like the very people all over the world who need Jesus. I think for most of us, that's what drew us in. **We're initially drawn into missions because of our growing sense of how many lost people are in the world and just how lost they really are.**
 - ▶ **Call it lost-centered missions. Missions centered on reaching the lost.** Missions fueled by our love and compassion for the lost. It's powerful. I was sharing with the college students the other day that **recent estimates place the number of unreached people in the world at 3.1 billion.**¹ By unreached, we mean those living in cultures (people groups) that lack churches made up of their own people who are capable of evangelizing the rest of the group. 3.1 billion unreached people in the world.
 - **And within that number, estimates say that there are approximately 28 million unengaged-unreached people in the world.**² We're talking about people who literally have no access to the gospel. They've never met a Christian because there are no Christians among them. 28 million.

- ❖ Think about this: **28 million is the projected population of Texas in 2016.**³ Imagine, out of everyone in our great state, there not being a single Christian among us. Imagine driving through Houston, through Dallas, through Austin and San Antonio. Picture all the cars on the roads and freeways. Think about all the suburbs, all the homes and apartments and high-rises. Picture all the shops and businesses and skyscrapers. **Imagine everywhere you go, everywhere you look, everywhere you are in our great state – imagine everyone being utterly lost, without hope in Christ, without anyone engaging them with the gospel.** That really puts things in perspective.

¹ see online: <https://joshuaproject.net/assets/media/handouts/status-of-world-evangelization.pdf>

² see online: <http://www.finishingthetask.com/stats.html>

³ according to the Department of State Health Services; see online: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/chs/popdat/ST2016p.shtm>

- ❖ Does that sit right with you? Doesn't that make you want to do something? That's a motivation. That's part of the missionary impulse. Perhaps you've heard stories or watched videos of lost people in distant lands, who are living without hope, worshipping idols literally made of stone or wood, and your heart breaks for them.
 - ▶ I think about last Spring Break on our college missions trip. Part of the trip involved **visiting a local Hindu temple** in Stafford, and we witnessed worshippers literally prostrating themselves before life-like figurines of supposed gods and goddesses. Reading about people worshipping statues in the Bible is one thing. But seeing it happen right before you, right now in our day, is a whole other experience.
 - **It breaks your heart and makes you want to do something.** To help them see that, *“The God who made the world and everything in it . . . does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”* (Acts 17:24-25)

- ❖ **Love for the lost is a beautiful motivation for missions. But it's insufficient by itself.** It's way better than a self-centered approach motivated by guilt. At least your focus is on the people. But let's be real. Our capacity to love is far from perfect. Our compassion is still nowhere near enough. **Love for the lost can wane and grow weak.**
 - ▶ I appreciate missionaries who are honest enough to admit that they went into the mission field motivated by a strong feeling of love for lost people, but **those feelings were quickly tested and challenged by real interactions with lost people.** It's not easy when you're living and serving among people who are from a completely different culture, who do things, say things, and think things that you find unbelievable and sometimes appalling.

- ❖ **A lot of us have pretty romanticized views of missionary work.** We picture exotic lands where you're sharing the gospel to curious natives sitting at your feet soaking up your stories about Jesus. It sounds so worthwhile. Better than sitting behind a desk all day in a cubicle.
 - ▶ Let's not be naive. **The task of missions today – getting the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world – will require you going into hostile lands where no one is welcoming you with open arms.** They'll more likely use the point of a sword or the barrel of a gun.

- ❖ If all you have to sustain yourself in the hard places, doing the hard work of missions, is your will to love people who hate you or care less about your gospel – it's not going to be enough. That's why we need Christ-centered missions. **Our missionary efforts need to be fueled most of all by our love for Christ.** By our desire to see Christ glorified. To see his name and fame spread and exalted in all the earth.

- ❖ Guilt-centered missions is self-centered. Lost-centered missions is better in that it's people-centered. But Christ-centered missions is the best because it's God-centered. **A love for God and his glory is what's going to keep the fire for missions burning in our bones.** Because God is infinitely worthy of our love and worship. That's a motive that never dries up, that never grows cold.

Serving a Christ-Centered Christ

- ❖ Now I think most of you wouldn't have a problem with any of that. Most Christians would agree that missions should be fueled by a desire to see God glorified. It seems only right.
 - ▶ But why do we believe this? **Why do we believe a passion to see God glorified should be the fuel of our missionary labor? One simple answer is because the Bible says so.** The Bible speaks of God's greatness and glory being the proper motivation. We read it earlier in our call to worship in Psalm 96. *"Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods."* (96:4-5)

- ❖ So yes, God is great and greatly deserves to be praised by all the peoples and feared above all gods. **We should be declaring his glory among the nations.** We know that's a good desire. **But what trips us up is realizing that God shares the same desire.**
 - ▶ Remember, Psalm 96 is God's Word. It was written by the psalmist but inspired by God himself. **So he's actually commanding his own people to declare his own glory among the nations.** That's what's confusing.
 - If we're the ones going to the nations telling them that God is great and greatly to be praised, we get that. But if God is the one sending us on that task, if he's the one seeking the glory – then it seems strange and selfish of him.

- ❖ But this is foundational. Christ-centered missions is the only kind of missions that will persevere. That will sustain through difficulties and opposition, through hard soil and hard to love people. **But what's going to sustain our Christ-centeredness? What's going to keep us passionate for God's glory? The answer is God's passion for his own glory.**
 - ▶ This is the monumental truth I was confronted with the first time I read John Piper's book, *Let the Nations be Glad*. ***"The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. . . . 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."***⁴

⁴ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, 15.

- ❖ That was a huge paradigm shift for me. **I want to tell the nations about the greatness and glory of God – because my desire is to exalt God’s glory – because God’s desire is to exalt his own glory.** Now I know we’ll need to address the question of whether it’s loving for God to exalt his own glory, but before we do let’s be sure we actually see this in Scripture.
- ❖ Turn with me to **John 17**. This is a prayer that Jesus is going to pray for the disciples that he dearly loves. He just told them that he’s going away (16:28), but he’s leaving them in a world that hates them (15:19), that will persecute them (15:20) and possibly kill them (16:2). But he also promises to pray to his Father to send another Helper, the Holy Spirit (14:16).
 - ▶ So in chapter 17, Jesus begins to pray for them. His disciples are probably thinking, “*Wow, this is going to be great. Jesus is about to personally pray for me. He’s about to ask his Father to help me and protect me in this world. He’s so thoughtful.*”
- ❖ **But then he goes on for five verses without mentioning them and instead focuses on himself, asking to be glorified.** “¹*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you* ⁴*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.* ⁵*And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”* (17:1-5)
 - ▶ This is a perfect example of a Christ-centered prayer seeking to exalt the Son of God. And if I were the one praying it, you’d probably lend a hearty Amen. **But Christ is the one praying this prayer for himself to be glorified.** It’s pretty clear. “Father, glorify me. Glorify your Son.” Those are Jesus’s own words.
- ❖ Let me point out a few more texts. There’s a whole list found in *Let the Nations Be Glad*.⁵ For example, we see in Scripture that:
 - ▶ **God created us for his own glory** (Isa. 43:6-7): “*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.*”
 - ▶ **God called Israel for his own glory** (Jer. 13:11): “*I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory*”.
 - ▶ **God rescued Israel from Egypt for his own glory** (Ps. 106:7-8): “*Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works Yet he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make known his mighty power.*”

⁵ Ibid. 17-21.

- ▶ **God exiled Israel to Babylon but later redeemed them all for his own glory** (Isa. 48:11): *“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 as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. 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.”*
 - ▶ **God planned to redeem us in Christ for his own glory** (Eph. 1:4-6): *“He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace”.*
 - ▶ **God will send his Son once more for his own glory** (2 Thess. 1:9-10): *“[Those who do not obey the gospel] will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away 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 among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”*
- ❖ These are just six passages but they cover the span of the biblical narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. And it becomes clear that Scripture teaches that the beginning, middle, and end of human history is about displaying God’s glory to the world.
 - ❖ Now before we move on and apply this truth to missions, let's tackle the question many of you are probably struggling with. Namely, how is this loving of God? **You're thinking it doesn't feel very loving for God to seek his own glory.**
 - ▶ If your husband told you that his greatest passion in life is for you to see and savor his glory, I don't think you'll feel very loved. I think you'll be very annoyed. Self-exaltation doesn't come across very loving but rather very narcissistic. But of course your husband is not God. And that makes all the difference. **God is the only being in all the universe for whom self exaltation is an act of love.**
 - ❖ Think about this. If the moon were to refuse to be glorified, if the moon were to deflect praise to the sun, telling us that its own glory is merely a reflection of the sun's – then we'd call that humble and true. **But if the sun were to do the same, if the sun refused to let its glory shine, if it deflected praise and kept its glory to itself – then we'd call that cruel and unloving.** Because we need the sun. We couldn't exist if the sun didn't let its white-hot glory shine for all to see and savor. The sun is the only object in the solar system for which self-exaltation is loving and for our good.
 - ▶ The same goes for God. **We would be devastated if he refused to let his glory shine.** We need God. We need to see his glory. It's for our good. It does us good. If he kept his glory from us, he'd be cruel not humble. **So he's actually loving us when he exalts himself before us.**

- ❖ I see this truth in the Romans passage we read earlier. Let me read Romans 15:8-9 again.

“⁸For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”

 - ▶ Why did Christ come to earth? What did he come to accomplish in his life and death? Paul is saying Jesus came to be a servant – **to serve the Jewish people (the circumcised) in order to show (vindicate) God’s truthfulness.** In regards to what?
 - **In regards to his promises to the patriarchs.** Particularly the promise to Abraham that through his family all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3). So he also came to show God’s truthfulness in regards to this promise to bless the nations/Gentiles.

- ❖ That's in v9, *“in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”* So Christ has come to be a servant that God might get the glory. The glory for what? For his mercy. **God gets glory for showing mercy to the nations/Gentiles.**
 - ▶ This is why I say God is loving us when he exalts himself. Because he’s exalting the glory of his mercy. **God gets the glory from us because we get mercy from him. That’s love!** What he's shining before us, so brilliantly like the sun, is his abundant mercy towards sinners like you and me.
 - We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We deserve the wages of sin. We deserve death. But God is so glorious, he's so great and greatly to be praised, because he didn’t send his Beloved Son to rightly condemn us – but to humbly die for us and for our sins.

- ❖ God is the most God-centered being in the universe. Christ is the most Christ-centered person in the world. **And it’s because his greatest passion is to spread the fame of his name to all the peoples of the earth – we make it our greatest passion.** It’s the very heartbeat of the Church and it’s what fuels our missionary labor.

Applying Christ-Centeredness to Missions

- ❖ Let me conclude by applying this idea of Christ-centeredness to how we approach missions in our church. I’ll leave you with two implications.

- ❖ **1) If the glory of Christ is what fuels missions, then the engine for missions in the church is not the missions department but the worship service.** If a passion for missions is weak in the life of our church, the problem is not that we don’t have enough workers in the missions department. It’s not just that we’re lazy or selfish or callous to the fate of the lost.
 - ▶ Sure those problems could exist, but **the underlying problem is a worship problem.** Our view of God is too small, too weak, too provincial. He’s not all that great in our eyes, which is why we can tolerate the fact that he’s not greatly praised among the nations. **We care little about missions if we have too little a view of God.**

- ❖ **This is why I don't understand why 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 missions. I don't get that.
 - ▶ We gather every Sunday to unapologetically worship. **Because we're convinced that zealous, passionate worshippers of Jesus are the most zealous, compassionate missionaries for Jesus.** If we want to be a church on fire for missions, we have to become a church on fire for the worship of God.

- ❖ **2) If Christ is the most Christ-centered person in world, then our missionary efforts are sure to succeed – so long as they're Christ-centered and aimed at his glory.** God's purpose for all the nations to glorify him for his mercy will not fail. His plan to redeem a global people in order to receive global praise in a thousand tongues is an absolute certainty. It's going to happen.
 - ▶ So if we're disobedient, if we don't engage as a church or as individuals, it's not like the cause of global missions will lose out. It's not like God's plan will lose out. No, we'll lose out. It'll be our loss. And God's purposes will succeed without us.
 - But on the flip side, if we're obedient, if we engage the nations, if we faithfully go and if we faithfully send – any effort exerted for the sake of Christ and the glory of his great name will never fail because God will never fail to bring glory to his Son.

- ❖ Missions is way too hard, way too discouraging, way too lonely and dangerous. **I don't see how you can persevere in missions if you don't have the rock-solid confidence that your efforts will never fail.** Because they're centered on God. Because God is far too God-centered to not ensure success.