

The Supremacy of God in Missions through Prayer

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[0:00] We are going through John Piper's book, Let the Nations Be Glad, The Supremacy of God in Missions. And the last two weeks we have been talking about chapter one, which is the supremacy of God in missions through worship.

And in a couple of minutes I'm going to ask you for comments or questions. But before we do that, I want to do some review. So please be prepared if you have some questions or comments. It's going to be in a few minutes.

The big idea from the first week was that missions exist because worship doesn't. And so worship is the goal and the fuel of missions.

So let me propose the situation to you. We're going to play doctor and patient and I want you to think about and propose a diagnosis.

So here's a church that's just moderately interested in missions. They aren't passionate about it. You know, they send money maybe to the field from time to time.

[1:09] But most of them really aren't totally excited, aren't passionate about it. And most of them don't think very much about missions.

They're sort of happy generally living their life and doing what they want to do. They only pray sporadically for missions in their own private devotions.

No one ever goes out of the church to the mission field. You know, it's just sort of this moderate, low-grade interest in missions.

They might talk about it some, but they aren't praying zealously for it. They aren't sending. They aren't sacrificing. There isn't this hot-blooded passion, bubbling excitement and intensity for missions.

And the nations of this world. So that's the situation. That's the patient. What are some possible diagnoses? I hope you'd admit that there's something wrong with that picture.

[2:11] Something unhealthy about that church. What could be some possible problems? What do you think? Anyone want to venture a guess?

There. Self-interest. What do you mean? Okay. Yeah, so they're viewing the church as sort of an extension of, we've talked about this, their little kingdom.

And the way the church looks, the payment, the programs. They're more interested in themselves than they are in God's work. What else? Jim? Would this apply for Jesus said that they honor me with their lips, with their heart, they're far from me?

Certainly. Certainly. I mean, it's possible to be in a good church or be in a church, to be saying the right things, doing the, but not really feeling the right things.

Not really, their heart's not in what they're about. What else could we say? What else is the problem? Based on our Sunday school lessons.

[3:14] Yes, Dale? Okay, maybe that's willful ignorance.

Maybe it's just accidental ignorance. They're ignorant. They need to be taught. What else?

Michael? Okay, lack of love for the lost.

I think that might go back to what Dale said. They're too self-interested. Okay, that's the one I was going for.

All those were really good. But I think they all fall under this category. There's a lack of passion for God to be worshipped.

I would venture a guess that God is not being really worshipped very much in that church because they have no passion to see God worshipped in other places.

[4:16] God isn't exciting. God isn't worshipful. And so it goes back to our last Sunday school series on the emotions. There's everything in God to excite us.

There's everything in the Bible to thrill our hearts and in the gospel to excite us and fill us with yearning and joy. But where there's no passion for missions, it's a symptom that there's really no passion for God.

There's really no passion for God because the whole point behind missions, the great point, is that God would be worshipped.

That's why God is doing it, that he wants to be worshipped. And so there's a disconnect there. The words of their mouth don't match up with the passion of their heart. So they'll say, yes, we believe in missions and they do some things for missions.

But there's no excitement there. So God is supreme in missions. He's the goal of missions. He's the fuel of missions. And then we talked about the foundation for our passion.

[5 : 24] Why should we be so passionate about God's glory? It's because God is passionate for God's glory. God's heart is always fully engaged in seeking his own glory.

So he loves it. It thrills him to find new ways to honor and glorify himself. And so all that he does, everything that God is doing in your life right now, whether it appears good to you or something that is uncomfortable and bad, God is pursuing his own glory.

He wants to have glory out of you and everything else he is doing in the world. He's doing it for his own glory. And so God is the most God-centered being in the universe.

All that he does, he does to make a name for himself. But last week we saw that that proposes a problem. And the problem is that doesn't make, or superficially, that can make God seem very selfish and not very loving.

How can God be loving? How can this be good news? Well, all God does is seek his own glory.

How does the pursuit of God's glory keep him from being egotistical and narcissistic and selfish?

[6 : 44] So how did we answer that objection? We talked about that objection. Why isn't God just selfish if all he does is pursue his own glory? What were two answers that we talked about last week?

Mark. Right. His pursuit of glory is tied to mercy, especially as we think about missions.

His pursuit of glory, the glory God is pursuing supremely, is the glory of his grace and of his mercy.

So we looked at Romans 15, and we looked at Ephesians chapter 1 about why is God predestining?

Why is God sending his Son? Why is God sending his Spirit? It's because he's trying to glorify his grace and his mercy.

And so God has tied mercy to us, grace to us, and his glory. And so as he pursues his glory, it is for our good. There was another thing.

[7 : 53] Why isn't it the most selfish thing for God to pursue his own glory? That was one idea.

There was another one. It was a nice sentence that we talked about.

Do you remember? Do you remember? God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

So, as God pursues his glory in us, the supreme way that he is going to do that is by satisfying us in him.

So, as God pursues his glory, he is filling us up with joy and contentment and satisfaction in all that he is for us.

Now, this isn't God giving the green light to all of our desires, good or bad. It's God giving the green light to making us really, truly, everlastingly happy in him.

[8 : 58] In him. And so, God is primarily seeking the glory of his mercy, and he does that by satisfying us.

And so that's what we talked about the last two weeks. Now, are there any questions? Are there any comments over what we covered the last two weeks that you would like to share? Everyone's content?

No problems? Okay, let's go. Move on to chapter 2. Chapter 2 today and next week is, Lord willing, the supremacy of God in missions through prayer.

So, the last two weeks was supremacy of God in missions through worship. So, now we're talking about the supremacy of God in missions through prayer. And so, here's the first point.

Let's just dig right in. Here's the first point. Prayer is for war. Prayer is for war. We don't get what prayer is about unless we understand that life is war.

[10:02] The Christian life is war. That's not all it is. Of course, that's not all it is. But it is always that. It's always that in this life.

The reason we, including me, neglect prayer is because we basically think that life is peacetime. I mean, that's, you know, we'll say that life is war and we should be participating in the Christian warfare. But the reason we don't pray like we ought is because we really think, in our heart, we've come to the conclusion that life is basically peacetime.

Now, let me ask you, what does the Bible say? What does the Bible say? Can you think of some verses or some themes that shows us, that tells us that the Bible thinks that the Christian life is primarily one of warfare?

It's a warfare life as we're on this earth. Can you think of some verses or some themes or some ideas? Jim? Remember what Jesus said with his disciples that if they were hated, not to be surprised by it because he was hated before they were.

[11:14] Okay, that's very good. So, what does it mean to be a disciple? Well, in this life, it's going to mean being hated. You're instantly in an adversarial war or adversarial position.

When you come out of the kingdom of this world and you come into the kingdom of Christ, it means that the kingdom of this world, those people, are going to hate you. That's very good.

What else could we say? Some verses or ideas. Dale? Very good. We're supposed to think of ourselves as a soldier so we don't entangle ourselves with civilian affairs.

Civilian affairs. Civilians can afford to think about a lot of different things and do a lot of different things. Soldiers have to fight. Tom? Tom? Let's turn there.

Ephesians chapter 6. We're going to talk about a few other verses but we want to talk about these. Ephesians chapter 6. 12 through 18. Paul doesn't go into any length to say that the Christian life is warfare.

[12:30] He just assumes it. And he says, we're fighting. He says, life is war. You see that in verse 12. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore, put on the full armor of God. And then, Paul does something very interesting if you think about it. He takes all the precious blessings that come from the gospel that we normally think of gentle, good things and he transforms them into something used for war.

So, if we have righteousness, we must wear it as a breastplate. So, that righteousness that comes from justification, we wear it as a breastplate.

If we cherish the gospel of peace, well, now they have to become the footwear of soldiers. If we love resting in the promises of faith, we have to use it as a shield.

And so, salvation, it must become a helmet to us. These things that we're used to thinking of as sort of peacetime, they're civilian, now they're transformed into items for war.

[13:54] So, the word of God that is sweeter than honey is now a sword. So, every civilian blessing is drafted for war.

And so, brothers and sisters, the Christian life is warfare. What it means to receive the gospel, what it means to believe the gospel is to enter into battle.

Can you think of any other verses that talks about the Christian life being warfare in any way?

Roger. Sometimes, our enemies are always powers in high places.

Sometimes, our enemies are also our family members. That's what it means to be a Christian.

There's going to be division. What else? Any other verses?

How about 2 Timothy 4-7? I have fought the good fight. Paul looks back on his life, his Christian life, and he says, I fought the good fight.

[14:59] What does he tell Timothy to do in 1 Timothy chapter 6? Do you remember? Paul said in 2 Timothy, I fought the good fight. In 1 Timothy, he tells Timothy, you fight the good fight of faith.

So, we talked about the world being our enemy. We've talked about powers in high places, that satanic powers being our enemy. We've talked about Jesus saying, your family is going to be your enemy.

So, now, this warfare is in our family life. It's in our relationships with the world. It's in our relationships with demons. And then, in 1 Corinthians 9, 26, 27, listen to what Paul says.

Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly. So, he's not running and he's just meandering around a cornfield. He's running a race.

He wants to win. And then he says, I do not fight like a man beating the air. I don't shadow box. I'm not fighting a pretend foe. He says, no, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I preach to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

[16:13] Paul saw that sometimes the enemy that he had to fight was his own flesh and blood. The enemy he had to fight was his own body.

Think of Psalm 2. We've gone through Psalm 2. The nations roar and they're in rebellion and Jesus laughs and he breaks them with his iron scepter.

That's what it means to be a Christian. It means to be on Jesus' side as he breaks the kingdoms of this world. So, Christian life is war.

Your life is war. Steve, did you have something? Very good. You have to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

We're not saying you push him down, you have to kill it. That's violence. So, the Christian life, it's always war. That's not all it is, but that's what it always is.

[17:17] And I don't think Christians get this most of the time because if we did understand it, we would pray differently. We would pray differently.

also, we would live a certain kind of life. See, when you live a wartime life, you live differently than you live a peacetime life.

You don't think about things and people in the same way when you're at war. Now, what happens is in war, you spend your money differently, you think about things differently, you live differently.

Now, how many of you are alive during World War II? Raise your hand. Lou? Yes, you are alive. I was talking to him this morning, he said the Civil War was a bit fuzzy, but he remembers World War II.

So, Lou, I know you're not afraid to speak, so let me ask you, how did life change when December 7th, 1941 happened and the United States entered into war?

[18:33] How did, what changed about life? About life. About your life. What's that? We stopped faith. We pushed everything. And we left us to be a bunch of winners and we left us to fight.

Okay. So, who participated? participated? The men and women or the men at the front participated? Young men?

No, nobody was too young? What about life at home? women who didn't work in the factory, they go to the factory because the men are gone.

Could you go and buy a tire anytime you wanted? No, can't buy tires anytime you want. Could you buy as much food as you wanted? There are rations. everything dead.

Okay. The whole auto industry shut down. Can you imagine that? GM just shut down. Now they're making a set of cars, they're making armored cars and tanks and whatever else.

[19:54] Life changes when you're at war and it shows in some way that Christians don't, and I include myself, so much of the time we don't think of life as wartime because if it was, we would live some way differently.

And we don't see that anywhere clearer but in prayer. In prayer, you pray differently when you're thinking that this is for battle.

What a lot of people have done has, we've changed the walkie-talkie, John Piper likes to call it, the walkie-talkie of battle time, communication. That's what prayer is.

And we've traded it and tried to use it as a domestic intercom. So, we want more champagne and so we buzz up.

And for some reason it doesn't work. It doesn't work because prayer was never meant to increase our comforts. God didn't design prayer to give me more of what I wanted and to help me build my little kingdom.

[21:09] He gave us prayer in order that we would fight. In order that we would fight. So, the point is here that until we get that, that this Christian life is war, that prayer is for war, then we're not going to pray.

you and I, we're not going to pray like we were meant to. See, prayer is for calling up reinforcements. Ask the Lord of the harvest to raise up workers.

That's what prayer is for. Prayer is for calling in and asking for directions. Where do we go? Prayer is for calling in our champion so that he will fight for us.

Prayer is how we wield the word. I think you're still in Ephesians 6. Look at verses 17 and 18.

Prayer is how we wield the word.

Verse 17, take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

[22:22] In the original, in Greek, verse 18 doesn't start a new sentence. Instead, it starts a subjunctive clause. It starts a clause that tells us more about verse 17.

And so it says, take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God praying, praying in the spirit. So how do we take the sword of the spirit? We take it praying. How do we wield the sword of the spirit? How do we use the sword, the word of God?

We do it praying. So prayer is how we use the word of God. Prayer is meant to be the power that plugs in the word of God to God's power.

Because I think you know that so many times we can preach and we can teach and the word of God can go and it can just fall on deaf ears. It can be powerless in your life.

[23:21] But when we plug it into prayer and then God honors his word, then the word of God runs and is victorious. So how do we use the word of God in an effective way?

We do it praying. Praying. So what's the power of the preached word? It's the spirit of God. And when the spirit comes, he comes through prayer.

And when we pray, and so it says take the sword, praying. So prayer is for wielding the sword. But what millions of Christians have done is we've changed, we've stopped believing that life is war and we've taken prayer and turned it into a domestic intercom.

And it didn't work, it doesn't work now and it doesn't work even in James day. What did James say? When you ask, you don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Praying for our pleasures is not something new, it's what naturally flesh does with prayer. So brothers and sisters, the real, the crying need of the hour is that churches would be put on a wartime footing.

[24:41] See, I think we misunderstand war a lot because of the kind of wars that we have been engaged in. War. We haven't had a total war where every civilian in every part of life was structured in order to fight the battle.

We haven't had that in most of our lifetimes. Not since World War II. See, we're used to thinking of war as something that you can do on the side that doesn't demand an intrude in every part of your life.

But the war that we are engaged in spiritually is a total war. It goes to the ends of the earth.

And the losses, when people lose in this war, they lose forever and ever. And so we need to stop listening to the devil who's whispering, peace, peace.

When in reality, there's no peace. There's no peace at all. And we're at war. Jesus is at war. Read Revelation. We need to see that.

[25:52] And we need to see it clearer if we're going to pray like we ought. So what is prayer about? It's about warfare. I think I've made that point clear. So let me ask you, are you in it?

Are you in the battle? Have you gone AWOL? If you are, you'll do all that you can do to be here on Wednesday night.

I know that sometimes you can't, but you'll do what you can to be here on Wednesday night and pray with God's people. Because that's what Wednesday night is about. It's not an extracurricular thing.

It's not an extra. It's when we pray for, it's when we go to war. Here's the second point. Hope motivates prayer.

Hope motivates prayer. One of the biggest reasons that we have a hard time getting excited about prayer is because secretly I think we don't think it does much good.

[26:56] I mean, no matter, it's amazing the unbelief in our hearts. How many times has God answered our prayer and yet when we're faced in another situation where we need to pray, we think, oh, it's not going to do any good.

We have to convince ourselves to pray. And the reason we don't pray for missions is that sometimes it seems so pointless. There's no hope. Prayer doesn't make a difference.

So what's the point? Things will never change. The battle goes on and on and on. It will never end. And so as wars drag on, one of two things happens.

Either hope for victory becomes rarer and rarer or there's more hope for victory. And as hope disappears, so does vigor.

You stop trying to win the war and you just want to survive the war. You just want to make it out alive. You just try not to lose. You just try to hold on. And sometimes that's the way it could be with prayer and missions.

[27:58] We don't think we're really going to win. And so we just pray minimally to maintain ground. So are we just going to hang in there? Or are we going to see God's kingdom advance completely to victory?

Well, I tell you, we're not just going to hang in there. We are not just going to hang in there. God is going to win this battle that we are in. God will win the war.

And that's the hope. And that's the hope that motivates prayer. Listen to Psalm 86, 9. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord. They will bring glory to your name.

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you. What's the point of missions?

Worship. And what is going to happen? All the nations will come and will worship.

Revelation 21 says, in the new Jerusalem, the nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

[29:05] Where are all the nations going? Well, all the glory and honor of the nations is going to the new Jerusalem because God is going to win. Seven times in Revelation, John uses some variant of these words.

Every tribe, language, people, and nation. There's seven times in Revelation some sort of statement like that. Why seven? Because seven is the number of completeness and John is making a point that every single nation, tribe, people, language, tongue, everything, God's victory will be complete.

It will be complete. Revelation 11:15, the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever.

So we're in this battle against this kingdom of this world and God is telling us, by the end when this is over, the kingdom of this world will be my kingdom. I will completely take it over.

It will be completely won for King Jesus. And so brothers and sisters, are we Calvinists? Do we believe in the sovereignty of God?

[30:17] Are we hot-blooded Calvinists to actually believe what we say? God is sovereign in grace. Does God have irresistible grace? It's something that I have a hard time believing and yet there it is in the word of God and I have to believe it.

When God calls powerfully, people will come. And so we need to live in that hope that our Puritan forefathers had. So the modern missionary effort grew in the soil that the Puritans were involved in, were a part of.

It didn't grow in the soil of Arminianism and a God that was waiting for people to act. They believed in a sovereign God.

They believed that there was hope when they prayed. Because when they pray, God can and God will work for salvation.

And so they believed that the nations would come in. And they were destined to be the kingdom of Jesus. And so they really believed Jesus' words, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

[31:31] They believed it. And they believed Jesus' words, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations. And then the end will come.

And they believed it and set them to work. They believed it and set them to missions and it set them to praying. Hope motivated prayer. And hope motivated action.

So John Elliott, he was really one of the first missionaries in the United States. It wasn't even the United States then. He came to the New World in 1631 at the age of 27.

At the age of 28, he became a pastor of a new church in Roxbury, Massachusetts. It's just outside of Boston. And something happened. So John Elliott is in this new church and really the frontier is in his backyard.

The west was Connecticut or something. And he found himself living right beside 20 different tribes of Native Americans.

[32:40] Indians. And John Elliott couldn't avoid the practical implications of his theology. He couldn't avoid the fact that the Bible says that every nation, every tribe will hear and every tribe will bring in their glory to God.

That God is sovereign and that God uses prayer to wield the sword of the Spirit. it. And so there was hope. As he's standing there, those Native Americans who didn't know Christianity at all, who were worshipping some gods of nature, they were as ignorant and blind and as hardened in sin as anyone else, there was hope that they would come to Christ and that God would open their eyes. So at 40 years old, he, at 40, not 19, not 15, he started working on learning Aligonguin, the Indian language that they spoke.

So there's no grammars, there's no Rosetta Stone computer program, there's no university classes, he has to learn it from scratch, he has to learn each word, and it was hope that kept him moving forward.

He wasn't doing it just because he liked doing it, he was doing it because he had hope that it would work. And eventually he translated the scriptures into Aligonguin, he translated several good books into Aligonguin, and more than that, he started preaching.

[34 : 08] And those Native Americans who I just said, you know, they had no history of Christianity, no understanding, they were worshipping false gods, they were blind as can be, and he preached, and they believed.

They believed. And Native Americans stopped worshipping the gods of nature, and some of them started worshipping the Lord. And when he died at 84, John Elliott established numerous Indian churches, and some of them had Native American pastors.

The Lord took them from nothing, from complete darkness, and he turned them into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Well, how did all that work? What kept motivating John Elliott?

Well, listen to what he said. Prayers and pains through faith in Jesus Christ will do anything.

Prayers and pains through faith in Jesus Christ will do anything.

And so what set John Elliott praying and hoping and working so hard? It was hope. It was hope. It was hope in our sovereign God. And so now I have to ask myself, Jason, do you have the same God as John Elliott?

[35 : 24] You professed the same God. God, isn't it time to start praying and start hoping for those unreached peoples?

So, we pass out the Pray for the Unreached Peoples of the Day sheet. I try to do it every week. And I hope this is a lesson, this lesson encourages you to pray for these people.

They're not just names and faces that have no relevance to your life. One day you will be worshipping with some of these people. Because God will extend his kingdom to the ends of the earth.

And so take the prayer sheets. Learn about the Makassar people of Indonesia. Because every nation, every tribe, every language will be there.

The Makassar of Indonesia will be there. Why? Because God will bear his mighty right arm. He will save. He will do it.

[36 : 30] How do we know? Because the Bible says so. The Bible says so. And so this should be an encouragement to pray. It shouldn't be a discouragement to pray.

Jesus said, I have other people, or I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. They will listen to me.

God 10, 16. Jesus had other sheep. That's the doctrine of election. They're his. They belong to him. God the Father has given them to him. And all the Father gives me will come to me. And I must bring them, he says. I must. I'll call them and they will come.

Submissions is God's work. There's the hope. God is sovereign and this is his work. And it starts with the doctrine of election. Far from making missions unnecessary, election is the great motivation of missions.

[37 : 35] God is working. God has chosen his people. And God will save. He will save. So John Alexander was the former president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

And in 1967, at a missions conference, he said this, at the beginning of my missionary career, I said that if predestination were true, I could not be a missionary.

Now, after 20-some years of struggling with the hardness of the human heart, I say I could never be a missionary unless I believed in the doctrine of predestination.

Election is an encouragement to pray because God has planned to work. God is going to work. He is working. God knows all that are His and He will bring them in.

And so we can pray with boldness because this is God's work. It was that encouragement that kept Paul going when he was in Corinth.

[38:39] In Acts 18, 9, and 10, he's very discouraged. He's under attack. He wants to leave. He's feeling distressed. And Jesus comes to him and he said to Paul one night in a vision, do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent, for I am with you and no man shall attack you to harm you, for I have many people in this city, many people here, and I'm going to bring them.

So Paul, I have sheep here and I must bring them in. I'm going to call them and they're going to hear. So we can persevere in prayer. We can persevere in prayer because we know God is going to answer.

God is with us. This is his mission field. And we're joining with him. It's finally Christ's work and so he's going to bring his sheep and so all we're asking is for him to do what he said he's going to do. So, brothers and sisters, we need again to pray and understand the gospel of grace. It's free, sovereign, grace. We know it. Let's learn it again and until God has answered all of our prayers and all the nations of the world are at his feet, let's keep praying.

Well, we are dismissed.