

The Supremacy of God in Missions through Prayer (part 2)

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[0:00] Well, in this class we are going through this book, Let the Nations Be Glad, The Supremacy of God in Missions by John Piper. We're in week four out of ten weeks. Last week we began chapter two, the supremacy of God in missions through prayer.

So we're talking about two major points, and that's missions and prayer. And the first point that I tried to make last week is that we can't really know what prayer is, we can't appreciate what prayer is, until we understand that life is war. That's not all that it is, but that is always what it is. Life is war. And when we fail to believe what the Bible says about life being war, we neglect, we misuse prayer.

So life is war, and that's what the Bible is clearly saying, and if we're going to appreciate prayer, we need to appreciate that.

So 2 Timothy 4.7, Paul says, I have fought the good fight. And that wasn't peculiar to him, because in 1 Timothy 6, he says, Timothy, now you fight the good fight.

[1:26] So here we are, no matter where we're at in our Christian life, we are called to fight. So the life for a Christian is war.

So remember Ephesians 6. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. And he says, stand therefore.

So life is war. Life is war. And brothers and sisters, we need to let that sink into our bones. We have to let that etch itself into our psyches.

Most people, even most Christians, don't believe this in their hearts. And they show it by the way they live their life, their priorities.

[2:31] You could tell by the way they live, how they pray, how they spend their money, what they do with their time, how they raise their children, how they do their work.

Essentially, they think we are in peace time and not war time. And so when we pray, when they pray, if we pray, we tend to pray for our comforts instead of for God's help to stand in this evil day. And so they don't, a lot of people don't see this as an evil day. And where we have to stand or forever be lost.

Because in every war there are casualties. There are losses. And this war is no different. The losers don't only lose their lives, but they lose their souls.

Isn't that what Jesus said? Don't be afraid of him who can throw your body, kill your body, but be afraid of him who can, you know, kill you and then destroy your body forever in hell. The losers don't only lose their lives, they lose their souls forever.

[3:41] And that's true for ourselves. This is a battle for us. But it's also a battle for other people. We not only fight for ourselves, but we fight for others.

And so God calls us to fight for the extension of his kingdom, not only in our own hearts, in our own lives, but in the lives and the souls of the people around us.

And so think about your family, your children, parents. Our children come into this world as little forts for Satan's kingdom.

Their little outposts of his kingdom. They're born in darkness. And what will happen to them if they are not saved?

What will happen if they are not overcome by God's kingdom? Well, it's hell. It's hell. They'll be lost forever. They'll live their entire lives in this ugly rebellion against God.

[4:48] And then they'll go to their place. And so we have Satan's outpost right in our own families, in our own homes. And so that should make us pray.

We should be like Jacob wrestling with God. We need to be wrestling with God for our children's salvation. And so when we understand that prayer is not about my comforts, it's about God's kingdom, we begin to use prayer differently.

It's not a domestic intercom where we buzz up more champagne and hors d'oeuvres. It's called a wartime walkie-talkie to bring in reinforcements, to bring in God's help.

So the question I want you to ask yourself, are you in this war? Are you in this war or have you gone AWOL?

Have you fallen for the devil's lie who says, peace, peace, when there is no peace? Well, you can tell. You can answer that question by the urgency of your prayer life.

[5:55] A lazy prayer life shows that you've checked out. You've gone AWOL. You're missing in action. You're not here. And so that's the first point that we talked about.

And forgive me if I took long, but I want to reiterate that. That's something that we need to continually remind ourselves of. That life is war and prayer is to fight that battle.

And then we saw, secondly, that hope drives prayer. We don't pray hopelessly, but instead we pray because we have such a confident expectation of future good.

It's hope that God will conquer the kingdoms of this world. That this endeavor that we are involved in, this missions endeavor, this evangelism, this effort to extend his kingdom, God will win this battle.

Missions is supremely the work of God. It's his work. God is supreme in missions. And so that's why Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[6:58] Jesus is going to do the building. And did you hear that? I will do this. There's there's some resolution. He's going to do it. Or he says, I have other sheep that are not of this pasture.

I must bring them also. I must do it. And he's going to do it. And so let me ask you. Let me ask you. This is going to be an easy question, but I want you to think about the answer.

Whose idea is missions? Whose idea is missions? God's. God's idea.

God's idea. Sometimes I think that we have this idea in our heads that missions is something that we just do that's nice, that we came up with. It's some nice thing that we do for God. Like, if we want to do it, we can do it.

If we want to make disciples, we can do it. It's just it's an extra. It's a bonus. It's something that we can do nice for God because he loves us. But this is God's idea.

[8:01] It's God's idea. He's the one that gave us the great commission. And that was not a suggestion. That was not an option. It was a command.

It was his idea. And so he commands every single one of his disciples to be a disciple maker. So he empowers them by the Holy Spirit to go and make disciples.

And so missions is this is the point of this period of redemptive history. There's nothing else to do.

There's nothing else to do in redemptive history except to bring about the kingdom of God.

And part of that is missions. And so that's the whole point of redemptive history right now. And so God asks us. He allows us. He commands us to participate in his plan for this age that we find ourselves in.

And that's why Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God. Because as a disciple in this place in this time this is what we are to be about seeking his kingdom.

[9:14] And we know that God will complete his work. He will complete his work. The words of Revelation will come true. The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

Or it says, After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and they were holding palm branches in their hands. Every nation, tribe, people, language will be there. And that's the great hope.

The missionary endeavor will succeed because God will do it. See, if it was left to us, I mean, if we were honest with ourselves, if it was up to us, this ship would have sunk a long time ago.

This whole big church effort to reach the nations, it would have sunk a long time ago. But here it is. Here's the church. It's still fighting.

[10:19] It's still going on. And it's going to make it into the harbor of glory because God is going to do it. It's God's work. And so we pray.

Now, that's what we talked about last. Are there any questions or comments? Anything you want to add? OK, we'll get moving then. So today we're still talking about prayer admissions.

And here's the first point. That prayer proves the supremacy of God in missions. Prayer proves the supremacy of God in missions.

Now, I just got done saying that God is the main combatant. He's the main soldier in this war.

Missions really isn't about us doing things for God. It's about God.

It's his work, not ours. And so just think about how Luke talks about the Christian movement and how it spread in Acts.

[11:20] Turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 11. We're just going to trace a short span of the history of how God spread the Christian religion, his kingdom, and the early church.

Acts 11 and verse 18. This is the story of Cornelius and his conversion.

This is all part of it. And then Luke 18, or excuse me, Acts 11 verse 18. When they heard this, that is the apostles, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.

Let me ask you, why did the Christian faith spread to the Gentiles? What does that verse say? God granted repentance to even the Gentiles.

Remember, this wasn't Peter's idea to go to the Gentiles. It wasn't Peter's work in saving Cornelius. Who was the one that started the spread of Christianity from the Jews to the Gentiles?

[12:41] It was God. And then when God put Peter and Cornelius together, God granted Cornelius and his household repentance. This was God's plan.

This was God's work. So God granted repentance. Then, turn over to Acts 15 verse 14. This is sort of commenting on the same event of how Christianity has spread from Jews to the Gentiles.

Acts 15 verse 14. This is the Council of Jerusalem. And look at what it says. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles the people for himself.

So what was the driving force for the Gentiles' conversion according to this verse? What was the driving force behind their conversion?

What does it say? God taking for himself a people. And even before that, God showed his concern. So this missionary effort began in the heart of God with God having concern and then it reached out and God took for himself a people from the Gentiles.

[13:55] Then we go to Acts 16 verse 14. This is the account of the first European believer. So now the Christian faith is spreading from Asia to Europe.

And God is still at work. Look at verse 14. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God.

God opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. God opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

Now, so God is supreme. He's the chief actor in missions. And that's why God has ordained prayer to have such a crucial place in the mission of the church.

Nothing happens in missions without God working. So nothing happens in missions without God working. And so the purpose of prayer is to make clear to everyone that the victory belongs to the Lord.

[15:07] The victory belongs to the Lord. So prayer proves God is supreme in missions. So let me ask you, how does prayer prove that God is supreme in missions?

How does it do that? Why does prayer prove that God is supreme in missions? Just sort of putting together everything I said. Kind of a tricky question.

Yes, Rex. Yes, Rex. Exactly. Exactly. If God is the only one that can save, and that He is the only one that can make any of our efforts effective, then prayer shows everyone who's participating in the mission that we need God, and that God is able to supply.

And when something happens, we know that God did it. See, prayer makes it clear where each of us stand.

We're the beneficiaries. He's the benefactor. And prayer makes it clear to everyone that this work that just happened in front of my face, it was not me, it was Him.

[16:27] And how do I know? Because I asked and He gave. So Psalm 50, verse 15, makes this crystal clear. Just listen to Psalm 50, verse 15.

Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me. So listen to Charles Spurgeon as he commented on this verse.

God and the praying man take shares. First, here is your share. Call upon me in the day of trouble. Secondly, here is God's share.

I will deliver thee. Again, you take your share, for you shall be delivered. And then again, it's the Lord's turn. Thou shalt glorify me.

So here is a compact, a covenant, that God enters into with you when you pray to Him, and whom He helps.

[17:23] He says, you shall have the deliverance, but I must have the glory. And here is a delightful partnership. We obtain that which we so greatly need, and all that God gets is the glory that is due unto His name.

Do you see that prayer has this place in missions, and it has its place in all of our life, because it puts everyone in their rightful place. It gives everyone their rightful due, so to speak.

It puts them where they belong. God is the all-sufficient benefactor, and we are in the place of the needy beggars that need Him to work for us.

And so when the mission of the church moves forward by prayer, the supremacy of God is clear to everyone. God gets the glory, and we get the help that we need.

And that's why He has established prayer as essential, and it proves that God is supreme. And so this connection, this connection between the need of prayer, the supremacy of God in missions, is also clear from John 15.

[18:38] Turn in your Bibles to John 15. This is a familiar passage about I am the vine, you are the branches. You remember this? John 15, verse 5.

And as we read this, I want you to think about it in light of missions. I mean, it has a much more wider, broader application, but think of it in light of missions, as that's what we're talking about. John 15, verse 5. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. So let me ask you, what can we in ourselves, as missionaries, as evangelists, do for God?

It's an easy answer. What can we do? Nothing. We can do nothing. We can have lots of human strategy. We can have lots of human effort.

[19:38] We can have lots of good intentions and hard work. We can even do things God's way. We can do everything just right. But what can we do in and of ourselves, in our own power?

What does Jesus say? Nothing. Nothing. The spiritual effect for God's glory is absolutely zero. It might look good on the outside.

It might look grand from the outside perspective, but it's an absolute zero. We can do, we can't do anything. Well, we can do something, and it's called nothing.

It's called nothing. And so, we want to see churches planted. converted. But can we do it? No. We want to see people converted, but can we do it?

No. We want to see men raised up and go to the ends of the earth, but can we do it? No. We want to bear fruit, some kind of lasting, spiritual fruit, but we can't do it.

[20:46] But the glorious good news of this passage is that God does not intend for us to be barren. So, Jesus is just putting us in our place.

Without me, you can't do anything. But that does not mean that God intends for us to do nothing, to be nothing, to bear no fruit. Look at verse 8. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit.

So, God has glory, and He gets glory when we bear much fruit. So, we do, we can glorify God, and this missionary effort will not fail.

It will actually succeed, because God intends to get glory as we bear fruit. Well, the question is, how then do we glorify God? How do we glorify God? If we can do nothing in and of ourselves, and God says, but I want glory if you bear fruit.

I'll get glory. So, you need to bear fruit. How do those two things come together? How do the nothingness of our own power and the glory that comes from us bearing fruit, how do they meet each other?

[21:55] Well, look at verse 7. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.

Now, do you see what Jesus is talking about in this passage? What kinds of things is he talking about when he says, ask for whatever you wish? What does the context say?

What exactly is he talking about that we're going to be asking for? Roger. Okay. That's very good. What else? What kind of things are we asking for? Fruit. We're asking for fruit. In the context, he says, whatever you wish as far as fruit bearing goes, if you ask, whatever you wish, you will have if this fruit is to God's glory.

And so, if you see an area of fruitlessness in your life, he says, ask for me, ask me, ask me for the power to bear fruit and it's yours.

[23:11] Just because we can't bear fruit on our own, it doesn't mean that we're left barren. We're not, it just means that we're shut up to prayer. Do you see that?

This is the great hope because this goes for us privately. I know some of my most despondent, despairing, depressing times happen when I look into my heart and I'm looking, you know, like Jesus was looking on that fig tree for figs and he comes to that fig tree and he doesn't find anything. Do you ever go to your own heart and you're looking for fruit and I don't see any and I'm supposed to care. I'm supposed to love someone. I'm supposed to desire something.

It's something that's supposed to make me happy in God and I look and there's nothing there. It's just leaves. There's no fruit. But here's this glorious promise that ask me whatever you wish and you'll have it.

If you want fruit in an area, it's prayer that will get you there. And so this applies to us personally and it applies to our missionary effort. We want to see the kingdom expand. We want to see the kingdom expand.

[24:23] We want to be more missionary minded. We want to be more evangelistic. But what do we see in our own? We see just this barren tree. We see that I am in and of myself.

I just care about me. I don't know about you but that's the way it is with me. I just care about me. I don't care about how those people are doing. I don't care if they're lost.

If I can just sit here and mind my own business and eat a good dinner, I'm happy. I'm looking for fruit and there's this barren tree. And so we want to see workers go to the harvest field but there doesn't seem to be any available.

We want to see lasting fruit from the nations. We want to see churches planted. We want to actually care for the lost. And are we just stuck in our own fruitlessness?

Jesus is saying no. No. No. We pray. We ask God to do for us through Christ what we cannot do for ourselves and what happens is that God answers.

[25:25] We bear fruit and He gets the glory. So prayer proves that God is supreme in missions because it shows that all of our fruitfulness personally in this missionary effort evangelistically it comes from Him and prayer shows us where that strength comes from and makes it clear that we only bear fruit because of Him and so God is glorified.

So let me ask you do you see the absolute necessity the absolute need for prayer in the missionary effort? We can't do what needs done but through prayer God moves.

Through prayer God moves. And why is it like that? Why do we need to pray? Why does missions only advance on the back of prayer? It's because God is after His own glory.

He set up this whole thing that this missions machine is going to grind to a halt unless we pray and when we pray it shines a light on who we are and it shines a light on who God is and God is glorified.

It shows that He's the powerful one. He's the sufficient one. He doesn't need us. We need Him. And so prayer makes it plain to everyone that the Lord is supreme. Proves it.

[26:54] So that was our first point. And I hope it's full of hope for you personally. And as you think about what your part in missions is your own personal life as a church, there are barren spots in us personally, corporately, but there's this glorious promise that if we pray, God will give us the fruitfulness that we seek.

So secondly, the work of missions, this is going to sound strange, the work of missions is not prayer. The work of missions is not prayer. Prayer is absolutely necessary for the advancement of missions.

Not because God needs prayer, but because we need God. And so it's almost impossible to emphasize too much the place that prayer has in missions, but still we need to take some caution here.

Prayer is not the work of missions itself. Prayer releases the power of the gospel, but it is not the same thing as preaching the gospel.

It is not the work of missions itself. The front line work of missions is the proclamation of the word of God. And so what I'm saying is if we replace preaching with prayer, we have hijacked, we've shanghaied missions.

[28:22] We've replaced something good with something that's absolutely necessary. They're both absolutely necessary, but in their own place. If we replace preaching with prayer, the mission is compromised.

So prayer makes the work a mission, that's preaching, it makes it possible, but it cannot replace preaching. So you might be, you're familiar with Romans 10.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, but how can they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. So Christ must be heard and must be known. And so remember, last week we said, take the sword of the Spirit praying.

The point of the praying is to be taking the sword of the Spirit. Prayer can't replace preaching. We can't satisfy ourselves with prayer. So, this week, the unreached people of the day, the Jum Jum of Sudan.

[29:34] So here they are. We should, we need to pray for the unreached peoples of this world. We need to pray for missions. But we can't, the point here is we can't satisfy ourselves with prayer.

It's not enough to pray for them. because they don't have the scripture in their own language. They need someone to actually go over, they need someone to translate the scripture to them.

They need evangelists to go over and preach to them. If we pray for them all day long, but no one ever actually goes and talks to them, then it's going nowhere.

The work of missions is not prayer. Prayer powers the work of missions. And it might seem like splitting hairs, but it's so important to, we can't satisfy ourselves with prayer.

We want, I want so desperately for us to be a people that pray for missions, but the gospel needs to be proclaimed to the lost. it needs to be given to them.

[30:51] They can't believe until they hear. So prayer is phenomenally important, but we need to pray that people will go. We need to pray that God will raise up men and the men that need to go will go and that they will hear the gospel and believe.

So we can't satisfy ourselves with endless praying. At some point, people have to go and preach. Now, the center of preaching, or the center of missions, is the preaching of God's word.

But that being said, so we're going to come back, that being said, that caution being given, we need to say what an awesome place that God has given prayer in this work of missions, in the purposes of God.

God has made the accomplishment of his purposes in this age, the extension of his kingdom, to hang on the preaching of the word. He's not going to extend his kingdom without his word being preached.

And he has hung the success of that preaching on prayer. No one can just coldly go into the pulpit and preach continually and expect God to bless that ministry.

[32:11] Because it will have everyone out of place. That person, that preacher will think that he has done something. And God will not give his glory to another, even if it's man preaching.

And so he's hung the success of preaching on prayer. Because that's how he's going to get glory. So the point is that the gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without prevailing earnest prayer.

That's why Paul repeatedly asks for prayer. 2 Thessalonians 3.1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified.

Ephesians 6.19 Pray also for me that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the gospel. Colossians 4.3 Pray for us also that God may open to us a door for the word. Prayer is that walkie talkie that connects us in the field to God, our general and our champion in heaven. Prayer is that walkie talkie that is in service to the word.

[33 : 33] And so what we need to do is to be so inflamed with God's glory that we start praying earnestly for God's kingdom to come.

That the nations will fall down on their knees and repent and believe. And so we need to be men and women who see prayer as warfare.

Warfare is different than Thanksgiving dinner. Warfare is different than Christmas. Christmas. Those things are fun. They're easy. But prayer is a call for hard work to go to war for God's kingdom.

To call in the needed help. So we need men and women of faith who will pray. Who will pray prevailing. Who will just keep praying.

Keep praying until God's will is fulfilled. Listen to George Mueller and what he said about prevailing prayer and his example.

[34 : 42] I'm now in 1864 waiting upon God for certain blessings for which I have daily sought him for 19 years and six months without one day's intermission.

Still, the full answer is not yet given concerning the conversion of certain individuals. In the meantime, I have received many thousands of answers to prayer. I have also prayed daily without intermission for the conversion of other individuals about ten years, for others six or seven years, for others four, three, and two years, for others about 18 months, and still the answer is not yet granted concerning those persons whom I prayed for 19 years and six months.

Yet, I am daily continuing in prayer and expecting the answer. Be encouraged, dear Christian reader, with fresh earnestness to give yourself to prayer if you can only be sure that you ask for things which are for the glory of God.

The call that Jesus puts on his people is to be like that widow who went to the unjust judge again and again and again.

The reason Jesus taught that parable was to teach us to pray and to never give up. And he says, how much more, if that's how an unjust judge will treat a widow, how much more will God save his elect those who continually call out to him, cry out to him.

[36 : 26] So, George Mueller, he's been praying for, he says, almost 20 years for certain people, every day without intermission. Let me ask you, is that possible for you?

Is that possible for you to become that kind of person who's so earnest and stubborn and prevailing in prayer? Well, we go back to John 15.

It's not possible for you. In and of yourselves, you can do nothing. You'll get bogged down in this world. Other things will distract you. You'll be selfish.

You won't pray because it's hard work. Without him, we can do nothing. But, can we have George Mueller's fruitfulness as he prayed, his prayerfulness?

Yes, if we ask for it. If we ask for it. Ask for whatever you wish and it will be given you. And so, brothers and sisters, we need to pray that we might pray.

[37 : 32] We need to keep praying until we have become men and women who are fruitful in this area. And we need to pray that God would excite us with the things that excite him. That we would be revived.

We would be revived. Well, are there any questions? Are there any comments? Well, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we ask that you would please move in us to see in our own lives, in our own selves, the truth of John 15 5, that without you, Lord Jesus, we can do nothing.

And yet, you have not consigned us to fruitlessness and barrenness, but you have said pray, and you will be fruitful. And it's to your glory that we bear much fruit.

So, Lord Jesus, will you work much fruit in us in this area of prayer, of prevailing prayer for missions, that we would pray that we would have a heart for missions, that we would have a heart for the lost, that we would have a heart for your glory, that we would pray until you have answered us, you have given us this promise, I pray that you would give us faith to lay a hold of it.

Will you teach us the place of prayer, not only mentally, but experientially in our lives? Will you teach us the place of prayer and missions, not only in our minds, but in our lives?

[39 : 10] And we pray that you would revive us, and give us hearts that love you, that aren't cold to you, that are quick to hear your word, and quick to obey, and quick to submit, and quick to love, and quick to worship, that you would have glory from our lives, that we would not live a single day more half hearted in any way, but we would be completely for you in all that we do, all that we are.

Pray this in Jesus' name, amen. Amen. We're dismissed.