

The Task of Missions

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 July 2011

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, we've come to the last chapter in John Piper's book, Let the Nations Be Glad, The Supremacy of God in Missions. We have this week and next week in the Sunday School, and then we're going to transition into a different study.

If any of the chapters of this book are groundbreaking or somewhat maybe thought-provoking, I think it is this last chapter. And so for the next two weeks, we're going to look at the question, what is the task of missions?

And that's primarily what we're going to be talking about this week. And then we're going to ask, what are the implications of that next week? So what's the task of missions? When we think about missions, I think a lot of times, and unmaliciously so, we have a very generic, very unspecific view of what missions is all about.

We know that it's about other people. Missions involves other people that are not here, that don't speak our language, that don't live by us. And so we would define missions as leaving your home and going somewhere else to reach as many people with the gospel as you can.

That seems like a fair enough definition. But I want to argue that that's not exactly specific enough. It doesn't have as much biblical clarity as we would like to see and as the Bible gives us.

[1:31] And so what I mean by biblical clarity is what we're going to see over the next two weeks, that God has a more specific task in mind when we send out, when he sends out missionaries, than just to go somewhere else and to reach as many individuals as possible.

And I think our beginning definition, the definition I just gave, has a subtly wrong error or a wrong idea about missions.

The focus in that definition is on individuals who happen to be somewhere else. And I think that's fundamentally wrong. I mean, it's not the worst of things to be wrong about, but it's fundamentally wrong.

And I think you're going to see what I'm talking about as we go along. And the problem with the wrong idea of missions is that it leads to wrong thinking and wrong doing.

We don't put the emphasis in places where we should. We don't do the things in exactly the way that we ought to sometimes. Missions is no different than any other Christian activity.

[2:34] What has to precede right Christian action? It always is right Christian doctrine. What we think leads to how we act.

And so this week we're going to try to nail down what exactly does the Bible say the task of missions is. So I gave my rudimentary definition of missions.

It's leaving your home and going somewhere else to reach as many people with a gospel as you can. The idea is that we want to save, and you understand how I say that, we want to save as many individuals as possible.

And as long as you're not doing it where you are presently, then that's missions. And so you get into ideas of home missions, where you're doing missions in your own culture.

And I think that kind of blurs the lines of what the Bible talks about when it talks about the task of missions. So what does the Bible teach?

[3:33] When the Bible talks about the missionary task, does it talk about individuals? And my answer is no. It doesn't talk about individuals.

The primary target of missions, the primary focus of missions, is people groups. It's people groups. And so the task of missions is not to reach as many individuals as possible.

Well, we obviously want to do that. But when we're thinking specifically about missions, the task is to reach all the unreached peoples of the world. And so we're talking about these kind of people.

These unreached peoples is the primary task of missions. But I don't want you to just take my word for it, or John Piper's word for it. We want to look at what the Bible says.

And so we have three main points today. And the first is the longest. And it is, what is God's plan for salvation? How has he designed salvation? And what does he say about it?

[4:36] And then secondly, we're going to look at the Old Testament hope. And then we're going to look at what Paul's view of missions was. So, turning your Bibles to Genesis chapter 10.

Genesis chapter 10. Why do I say that the task of missions is reaching unreached peoples, not just individuals? Because this is how God's plan of salvation is designed.

It's constructed this way. So Genesis chapter 10. I'm sure this is not one of the passages that you go to when you're in times of trouble and distress. It's probably not one of your favorite passages. You probably honestly have no idea why it's in the Bible. And I think maybe after today you're going to see why it is here. So Genesis chapter 10. We're going to read the first five verses.

But before we do, if you have the NIV, it has a title over this chapter. And it says, The Table of Nations. The Table of Nations. And what follows is 70 names of people.

[5:42] But they just aren't people. They're the heads of peoples, languages, nations of the world. So let's read the first five verses.

And we'll see what it says. This is the account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood. The sons of Japheth, Gomer, Magog, Madi, Javan, Tubal, Meshach, and Tiras.

The sons of Gomer, Ashkenaz, Riphth, Torgamah. The sons of Javan, Elish, Tarshish, the Kedem, the Rhodian. From these, the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with his own language.

So verse five is the summary of these first four verses. And you'll notice that it's not just tribes that we're talking about. It's nations, tribes, languages, like verse five says.

And I want to be very clear. When the Bible talks about nations, it generally is not talking about political states. That's the first thing that we think of when we talk about the nation of the United States.

[6:56] We mean a specific political state with a certain kind of government. And that's how we define it. But when the Bible talks about nations or peoples, they're talking about these things in verse five.

Territories, clans, nations, languages. The division is not political. It's cultural. So now we go down to verse 20.

Look at verse 20. These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages in their territories and nations. So you have that fourfold division.

Clans, languages, territories, nations. Then you go down to verse 31. These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages in their territories and nations.

So three times the same thing. Clans, languages, territories, and nations. And like I said, if you count all these names, there are 70 of them. Let me ask you, why do you think there are 70 of them?

[7:58] I'm just going to take some big biblical thinking. Any idea why there's just 70? Roger. So yeah, you have the number of, you have seven, which is the number of completeness.

And you multiply that by 10. The point that the author is making, these are all the nations. These are all the nations. I mean, all the peoples, all the nations, clans, tribes that are in existence came from Noah's sons.

And so this is a summary. This is a table of all the nations that came from those sons. And obviously things have changed. But in the biblical thinking, these are all the nations.

And that's what we need to think of. So chapter 10 is the backdrop. So we've just read all these names. These are all the nations of the world. It's the backdrop for two stories.

What happens in chapter 11? You can read it. The languages are divided, right? The Tower of Babel happens. The languages are divided. People are spread out. Verse 9 says in chapter 11, From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

[9:16] So chapter 11 is talking about how God scattered all these nations across the whole earth. And then chapter 12 begins something new. It begins the story of how God's redemption happens.

How God is going to redeem and bring back all these nations to him. And you're going to see what I mean as we go along.

So let's go to chapter 12. And let's read the first three verses. The Lord had said to Abram, Leave your country, your people, your father's household, and go to the land I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. And I will make your name great. And you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. And whoever curses you, I will curse. And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So this is the beginning of redemptive history. [10:23] This is the beginning of how God is going to save the peoples of the world. And so right here we see God's plan for salvation.

He chooses one man, Abram. And he promises to make him into a great nation. And through him to do what? What does verse 3 say?

Bless all the nations. Bless all the peoples. Do you see the connection between Genesis 10 and Genesis 12 now? Genesis 10 is saying these are all the nations of the world.

And Genesis 12, God is saying I'm going to save. I'm going to work. I'm going to take this one man, Abram. And through him I'm going to make a nation. And eventually through his seed I will bless all the nations of the world.

All the peoples. Now the word peoples here in chapter 12 verse 3. It can mean anything from a family. Like an extended family. To a clan.

[11:29] All the way up to a whole nation. So it has this wide variation of meanings. It can mean pretty small groups. And it can mean pretty big groups.

So in chapter 10 there's a list of all the clans, all the families, all the territories, all the nations. And in chapter 12 God promises to bless them all through Abraham.

And so what is God's salvation about? So it's saving individuals. But he has a bigger picture. And it's through saving peoples. And this isn't a one time thing either.

Turn over to Genesis chapter 18 verse 18. 18, 18. Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation.

And all nations on earth will be blessed through him. Then we get a little more clarity in chapter 22 verse 18.

[12:38] Chapter 22 verse 18. How about we back up to verse 17. 22, 17 and 18.

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of your enemies. And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me. So the nations, all the nations will be blessed.

All of them. And how will God do it? What does it say? Through your offspring.

Who's Moses talking about? Jesus. Galatians 3. It tells us.

[13:33] Paul tells us that Moses was talking about Jesus. The seed of Abraham. Abraham. So right from the very beginning God has planned his salvation. Not only to reach individuals.

But to reach all the nations of the world down to even the smallest group. And so when he set out to save. When he set the wheels of the plan of salvation into motion.

The end. The goal was to save and bless the nations. And there's other passages in Genesis where Isaac receives the promise. And it's to bless the nations.

And Jacob receives the promise. And it's to bless the nations. So God has peoples in mind when he sets about.

He starts the wheels of salvation turning. Different places. Different languages. Different cultures. Different tribes. And you can see this theme. Carried out right through the Bible.

[14:32] So turn in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 7. And Lord willing in several weeks we're going to get here in the evening.

But I want to see how this theme. Daniel picks it up. And Daniel does it more times than just this one. But I want to notice it here.

Chapter 7. Verse 13 and 14. So Daniel has a vision.

And in my vision at night. I looked. And there before me was like. One like a son of man. Coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days.

And was led into his presence. He was given authority. Glory. And sovereign power. All peoples. Nations. And men of every language worshipped him.

[15:30] His dominion is an everlasting dominion. That will not pass away. And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. So do those words sound familiar? Who's Jesus going to rule over?

Who's the son of man going to rule over? All peoples. Nations. Languages. Where did that come from? Well. We've read it before.

In Genesis chapter 10. And those passages. So Genesis promised. That God would bless all the nations through Israel. Or through Abraham.

And Daniel prophesied. That all people. Nations and languages. Will worship the son of man. Who receives this kingdom of God. God. And. So we pick up this theme.

Jesus kingdom. Is a kingdom. That extends. Over all the peoples. And all the languages. And nations. Of this world. So what happened?

[16 : 29] Well. The seed of Abraham came. Didn't he? And the son of man appeared. And he was preaching the kingdom. Of God. And through his death and resurrection.

He established the kingdom of God. And. Became. A blessing. To all. The nations. So how will the nations receive that blessing?

How will it get transferred? How will they receive it? Well. Jesus tells us in Luke 24. Repentance. And forgiveness. Of sins. Will be preached in his name.

To all nations. Beginning in Jerusalem. So this is the missionary task. This is where. We fit in. Where missions fits in. Jesus. Has. Saved.

Jesus has established his kingdom. His kingdom has been promised. To all the languages. And nations. And peoples of the world. And. Now what is the focus of missions? It's to preach. It's to preach repentance.

[17 : 27] Then. In Matthew 28. You know this passage. Therefore. Go and make disciples. Of all nations. So what's the church's responsibility? What's their mission now?

It's to preach. Repentance. And forgiveness. To the nations. It's to make disciples. Of the nations. Now. Obviously.

Individuals. Are included in this. Obviously. We can't make disciples. Of whole nations. But. It's out of the nations.

That we make our disciples. There's always this eye. On the nations. Every nation. Must be reached. And. Again. I'll remind you. It's not a political state.

It's. A. It's a cultural thing. It's a tribe. It's a language. It's a clan. It's a. It's a. It's a people group. So what have we seen?

[18 : 22] Genesis 10 and 11. The nations are spread out. Throughout the whole world. They've rebelled against God. But God has brought salvation. And Jesus Christ. And he's commanded. That.

His gospel be preached. To all those nations. How does the story end? Where's this all going? What's ahead of us?

Turn in your Bibles. To Revelation chapter 7. And look at.

At verse 9. 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.

[19 : 26] They were wearing white robes. And were holding palm branches. In their hands. And they cried out. In a loud voice. Salvation belongs to our God. Who sits on the throne.

And to the Lamb. So where are the nations now? They're all. Before the throne. People out of all these nations.

And tribes. And peoples. And languages. Are before. The throne. And more than that. God heals them. Turn over to Revelation 21.

Revelation. Let's read. 23 and 24.

Chapter 21. Verses 23. Or. 23 and 24. The city does not need the sun. Or the moon to shine on it.

[20 : 23] For the glory of God gives it light. And the Lamb is its lamp. The nations. Will walk by its light. And the kings of the earth. Will bring their splendor into it. On no day.

Will its gates ever be shut. For there will be no night there. The glory. And honor of the nations. Will be brought in. So will all the nations of this world.

Be obliterated. Will there be no distinctions. In heaven. The answer is no. We're not all going to be the same. In the new heaven.

In the new earth. There's still these entities. Called nations. They're not. States. They're not political states. But they're cultural. Groups.

And all the nations. Will walk. By. The light of God. They're not obliterated. And then God heals the nations. Revelation chapter 22.

[21:22] Verse 2. So it's talking about. The tree of life. On each side of the river. Stood the tree of life. Bearing 12 crops of fruit.

Yielding its fruit. Every month. And the leaves of the tree. Are for the healing. Of the nations. So do you see this major theme. Throughout the whole Bible.

God's plan of salvation. Is meant to bless. All the nations. Of the world. And so. God's salvation. Is a missionary salvation.

It's a salvation. It's a salvation. For other people. It's not just for individuals. It's for nations. And so. When salvation is finished. The nations will be healed.

And all these people groups. And all these languages. Tribes. They'll be brought back. From where they were scattered. Because of their rebellion. And they'll be brought into the new heaven.

[22:19] And the new earth. And so. Only when we get to the end of revelation. Do we get to see. Exactly. What God was promising to Abraham. When he said.

I will bless all the nations. Through you. That's slowly unfolded. Until we get to revelation. And we see. All these nations are going to be brought into the new heaven.

And the new earth. And they'll be blessed by God. And protected and healed. And so. Do you see why. The primary task of missions.

Is a focus on. Not reaching individuals. It's reaching. The unreached peoples. Of the world.

Because God. Is after. The nations.

And now there's a distinction. That we need to make. Between evangelism. And missions. And we're going to make that distinction later. But. Just hold on. If that's one of your thoughts.

[23:14] That you're not too sure about. Let's. Secondly. Let's look at the Old Testament hope. So when the church began. God told them to preach the gospel. To all the nations.

And that wasn't out of the blue. If you had read. In that time. If you had been reading your Old Testament. Very carefully. You would have seen this. Continual theme. Of God intended.

For the nations to be blessed. And to worship him. So the Old Testament. Fully expected God. To reach. All the unreached peoples.

Of the world. And to bless them. So just listen to a few of these verses. Psalm 91. Sing praise to the Lord. Who dwells in Zion.

Tell among the peoples. His deeds. Psalm 47. One. Clap your hands. All peoples. Shout to God. With loud songs of joy.

[24:10] Psalm 96. Ascribe to the Lord. O families of the peoples. Ascribe to the Lord. Glory and strength. Say among the nations. The Lord reigns. Isaiah 34.

One. Draw near. O nations. To hear. And to hearken. O peoples. Let the earth listen. And all that fills it. The world. And all that comes from it. Listen to the promises.

Psalm 2. I shall give the nations. For your inheritance. Psalm 45. 17. I will cause your name. To be celebrated. In all generations. Therefore the peoples.

Will praise you. Forever and ever. Psalm 86. 9. All nations. Who you have made. Shall come. And worship before you. O Lord. And shall glorify your name.

Isaiah 49. 6. The Lord says. It's too light a thing. That you should be my servant. To raise up the tribes of Jacob. And to restore the preserved of Israel. I will give you as a light.

[25:08] To the nations. That my salvation. May reach to the end of the earth. Isaiah 52. 10. The Lord has bared his holy arm. Before the eyes of all the nations.

And all the ends of the earth. Shall see the salvation of our God. Isaiah 66. 6. 18. For I know their works. And their thoughts. And I am coming to gather. All nations and tongues.

And they shall come. And shall see my glory. There's a lot more verses. I just picked out. A handful. But all these verses.

Clearly demonstrate. That God. Has intended. From the very beginning. To bless. All the nations. And to bring them. To the place. Where all of them. Are worshiping.

Before him. So Israel was blessed. In order to be a blessing. To the nations. So what's the connection. Between this Old Testament hope.

[26:05] And the New Testament mission. Well. These verses are fulfilled. As they come to Jesus. As they see.

His light. In the gospel. And the way they see that light. The way these verses come true. Is as we. Take those. Take that gospel.

To the unreached peoples. Of the world. So those who are sitting. In darkness. Will see. A great light. So they'll worship. So how's the Old Testament hope.

Going to be fulfilled. It's going to be. Through missions. And the Old Testament hope. Was on.

Focused on. The nations of the world. Now.

If we're going to reach a nation. We're going to have to reach. Individuals. Aren't we? And. We will have to do. One on one evangelism. But the work of evangelism.

[27:05] Is not. The same. As missions. Evangelism. Is focused on. Individuals. The work of missions. Is focused on.

The peoples. Of the world. The work of evangelism. Is. Not going to ever be finished. Because there's always going to be. Other. There's always going to be. Lost people.

To witness to. But there is a possibility. That the task of missions. Could be finished. Once we have reached. All the unreached. Peoples. Of the world.

And. You're going to see what I mean. Or an example of it. In our next. In our third point. And that's how Paul. Thought about. Missions. So turn in your Bibles.

To Romans 15. Romans 15. And verse 18. Through 21. Okay.

[28:16] Verse 15. Verse 18. I will not venture. To speak. Of anything. Except what Christ. Has accomplished. Through me. In leading the Gentiles. That's the word.

Nations. The nations. To obey God. By what I have said. And done. By the power of signs. And miracles. Through the power. Of the spirit. So from Jerusalem. All the way around.

To Illyricum. I have fully. Proclaimed. The gospel. Of Christ. It has always been. My ambition. To preach. The gospel. Where Christ. Was not known. So what I.

So. That I would not. Be building. On someone else's. Foundation. Let me ask you. Was Paul's goal.

To win as many. Individuals. As possible. Or was it. To win as many. People groups. As possible. It was to reach.

[29:10] People groups. And we know that. Because. He could say. From Jerusalem. To Illyricum. That's. Present day. Croatia. And Albania.

All the way from there. From Jerusalem. To Illyricum. I have fulfilled. I have proclaimed. The gospel. And that should make us. Stop and think.

This is a huge. Area. With hundreds. Of thousands. And millions. Of people. Living in it. And millions of people.

Who didn't believe. Who still needed to be evangelized. And Paul could say. My work here is done. I am done.

I have fully proclaimed. I have fulfilled. The gospel here. The gospel has been fully proclaimed. But we know there was still more work to do. Remember he sent Timothy.

[30:06] To Ephesus. And while in Ephesus. Paul wrote him a letter. And he said. Now Timothy. Do the work of an evangelist. Evangelism was still. Necessary.

But Paul could say. Well there is no more room for me here. My work here is done. I am going to Spain. That is what he says in verse 23. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions.

Is he talking about evangelism? No. He is talking about missions. Because there is more people to evangelize. There is no place for me to work in these regions. I hope to go to Spain.

So do you see what Paul is thinking? He was not after more and more individuals per se. Although that was part of it. But he saw himself as a missionary. And his primary task was on the nations.

The people groups. It is possible. And it is probably likely. That if he would have stayed in Corinth. In Ephesus. In Philippi. In these places that he had been.

[31:04] That the church was established. That they had thriving ministries. That he would have seen more individuals saved. When we go to foreign places. Harder places.

A lot of times. The gospel doesn't reap. It doesn't. You don't see as many conversions. As you do in a settled area. But Paul said.

I am moving to Spain. The work here for me is done. And so do you see what this means for us? When we think of missions. We shouldn't think first and foremost.

Of countries. And cultures. That already have the gospel. That already have. An established church. It might be small.

But if they have an established church. Then the work. That needs to be done. Is evangelism. And so. We shouldn't be thinking of. Those cultures. But we should be thinking of.

[32:02] The unreached people groups. Where. Where. They don't have a bible. They don't have any witness. They are unreached. A great. Where.

The vast. Vast. Majority of them. Have absolutely no way. Humanly speaking. Of receiving the gospel. So.

The greatest need. Is not for more workers. For places like France. And Switzerland. The greatest need. Is for the thousands. Of people groups. Who.

Have no witness. At all. And that should be our focus. On missions. But. Don't take my word for it. Take David Vaughn's word for it.

He's a missionary to France. Did you guys. I wonder. If. How many of you read. The last ARCA update. This is from. Gordon Taylor's. Commentary.

[32:58] I just want to read. A little bit. And listen to what. David Vaughn. Said to the church. Said to Gordon Taylor. I recently wrote. Each of our missionaries. And asked them.

What areas. And needs. That they see. In their own country. I did this. Because I believe. There is a great need. To target particular countries. And to pray. That the Lord. Will raise up laborers.

For these specific countries. Or people groups. David Vaughn. Responded. And made a very important. Suggestion. He said. In effect. That the first place. Our BMS.

Should look. Is. At unreached. Or hidden peoples. That is. What we must think. And act. That is. We must think. And act. As the apostle Paul. And so. I have made it. My aim.

To preach the gospel. Not where Christ was named. Lest I should build. On another man's foundation. But as it is written. To whom he. Was not announced. They shall see.

[33:51] And those who have not heard. Shall understand. He further said. That if we bring our churches. To a well-informed position. About various mission fields.

That have yet to be reached. And encourage prayer. For these fields. That even if the Lord. Does not send someone. Forth from our churches. We will be cultivating. The spirit of missions.

He suggested. That before coming to France. And the French speaking world. Consideration should be given. To northern India. And it goes on.

And explains what. Gordon Taylor. Studied about. All the unreached peoples. Of northern India. Millions. And millions.

Of people. With no gospel. So brothers and sisters. When we think. Of. Missions. We need to put. Unreached peoples.

[34:46] On the front burner. That's. Who we need to think about. Now we pray. For all of our missionaries. But. The desperate need.

Is for. Men to go. To the unreached peoples. Of this world. Because. That's. The focus. Of missions. Now there's always. Evangelism. To do.

And we're not. Denigrating that at all. But when we think. Of missions. We need to put. The peoples. The unreached peoples. Of the world. Forefront. In our mind. Well let's pray.

Heavenly Father. We do pray. That you would please. Help us. To have. The same love. And the. The same affection. That you have. In your heart. For the peoples. Of this world. Thank you.

That it is. To your glory. That. People from every. Language. Nation. Tribe. Will be before you. That the Lord Jesus.

[35:43] Has purchased. Men and women. Out of all these nations. Thank you. Lord Jesus. For your great salvation. Pray that you would give us.

Your heart. For the lost. Take our hearts. Off of selfish gain. And. Put our hearts. On. Loving you. By loving.

Our. Lost. Fellow. Men. Please. Correct us. And change us. Help us.

In any way. That we are lacking. And it is in Jesus name. Amen.