

# Let the Nations Be Glad - Part 2

by John Piper

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*John Piper emphasizes that the ultimate goal of missions is to glorify God through worship, driven by a passionate zeal for His name.*

**Duration:** 1:19:16

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:11-16, John 15:20, Acts 14:22, 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, 1 Peter 4:12-14

**Topics:** "Missions Work", "Suffering Faith"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of missions, highlighting the need for believers to embrace suffering and sacrifice for the sake of spreading the gospel to unreached peoples. It underscores the biblical truth that suffering is a normal part of the Christian life, as Jesus and the apostles endured persecution. The sermon also stresses the significance of prayer in empowering the work of missions, connecting prayer to warfare and the refining of faith. Ultimately, the goal is to bring glory to God through joyful endurance and faithful service.

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## Transcript

Just a word of public thanks to Tyler and the team for inviting me and to you for hanging in there to the bitter end. I know there's no place in your brain for any more. It's been so packed and I'm honored that you would stay and listen one more time.

So let's ask God to give me his guidance and help and you some openness of mind and heart and wakefulness so that we can connect. Let's pray. Father, we need your help now.

You are a great and glorious God. You have sent your Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die for our sins and to rise again to defeat the devil and to bar hell and open heaven, not only for us but for millions scattered through all the peoples of the world, which you mean for us to reach with the Gospel. And we want with all of our hearts to be a part of this great cause.

And so I pray that you would come. I know that you are committed to this. I know that you love your glory and you love your people.

So grant, I pray, that we would be enlarged in our capacities to see your greatness and the greatness of your purpose. That we would be fit to pray as we ought day and night, crying out for the vindication of your people and your cause. And that we would be ready to suffer because this work will not be finished without

sacrifice and martyrs.

So I pray that there would come now an unusual sense of seriousness upon this assembly and that I would be given the freedom from self-consciousness and a preoccupation with you and with your truth that would be spiritual and produce effects that would run for thousands of miles and for hundreds of years. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen. The last time we defined the task of missions as joining Paul in doing the kind of missions that he did when he said that from Jerusalem all the way up to Albania he had no more room for work.

He had fulfilled the gospel and was heading, God willing, for Spain. Even though tens of thousands of people were unconverted in that territory from Jerusalem to Albania, he had no room for work. Which means there is a certain calling upon a person's life that cannot stay where the church has been planted and has the wherewithal to evangelize the tens of thousands of people that need Christ in that area.

Those are missionaries. This is missions with an S on the end. It cannot stay in a city like this.

It cannot stay in a city like mine. It must go to people groups that don't have any church within its own culture and its own language. I am aware of the complicating factor that so many of those unreached peoples have come among us and therefore we don't think in terms of fields anymore.

The Somalis in Minneapolis are 50,000 and there may be, as we make every effort, six believers gathered in a little fellowship with Paul and some of the others. We have ministries to them and it is not an easy work and that is missions. Though it is 150 feet away and zero feet away when they come for language learning in our church building.

This is an amazing people group. So I am aware that when I speak this it is not so much geography we are talking about as culture and language and laying down your life efforts to do the hard thing of planting a church among a people that don't have it. That was yesterday's definition of missions and my point was that in order to be biblically, authentically missional we must simply give ourselves in some measure in our churches and in our lives to missions.

Now, the question remaining for me are the questions of motive and the question of how. The how of preaching, the how of prayer and the how of suffering. So that is what we are going to talk about in the minutes that we have.

Let's go to motive first. Let me quote a couple of heroes. John Stott wrote a very good commentary on Romans and of course he was involved in missions big time in his heyday with the Lausanne movement.

Now he is an old man in a nursing home in Brighton and has been a great servant, one of my heroes. Here is his quote. The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the great commission, important as that is, nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing, strong as that incentive is especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, but rather zeal, burning and passionate zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Only one imperialism is Christian and that is concern for his imperial majesty, Jesus Christ and for the glory of his empire. Don't you just love Stott? That's written in his Romans commentary on Romans 1, 5 where Paul says he is an apostle for the sake of the name, that he is going out and gathering obedience from the Gentiles for the sake of the name. And then he adds this, we should be jealous for the honor of his name, troubled when it remains unknown, hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed,

and all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the honor and the glory which it is due.

Now that he says is the pinnacle motive of doing missions among the nations. And I just say with him, oh for the day when a passion in our churches, wouldn't it be glorious if your people all said my supreme zeal, passion, loving life is the imperial majesty of my king, Jesus. That's the way we want our people to feel and to talk.

And so that sets agendas for us in preaching and in praying. Here's the other hero, I brought his book along because it's such one of a kind, it's Operation World, I hope that you know this book. It's due for an update and I think one is underway, this is I think the third edition, but it's several years old.

Operation World, Patrick Johnstone is the man I'm talking about, and this guides you through praying for the political nations of the world and under those pages are descriptions of all kinds of situations in the church and non-church and the people groups that are in them. God bless Patrick Johnstone for this labor of love. We will know in heaven what fruit has come from the hundreds of thousands of prayers that have ascended for people groups because they were seen in this book.

So I've asked the question, years ago when I got the copy, I asked the question, what kind of mindset produces a book like this? What kind of mindset causes the kind of incredible labor? I mean the detail of this book for all the countries and thousands of the peoples and the condition of the church in all the countries, it is a massive undertaking with a large team that he works with. What's driving this? I want to know. And so I'll quote you the key paragraph from this book.

All the earth-shaking awesome forces unleashed on the world are released by the Lord Jesus Christ. He reigns today. He is in the control room of the universe.

He is the only ultimate cause. All the sins of man and machinations of Satan ultimately have to enhance the glory and the kingdom of our Savior. That's an amazing statement.

This is true of our world today in wars, famines, earthquakes, or the evil that apparently has the ascendancy. All God's actions are just and loving. We have become too enemy conscious and can overdo the spiritual warfare aspect of intercession.

We need to be more God conscious so that we can laugh the laugh of faith knowing that we have power over all the power of the enemy. He has already lost control because of Calvary where the Lamb was slain. What confidence and rest of heart this gives us as we face a world of turmoil and such spiritual need.

In other words, what's driving this book, the mindset and the heart from which it comes is a heart swelling with confidence in the imperial majesty of Jesus Christ over everything in the world including the tragedies and the sins and the evil of our day. Now this mindset is what has historically driven missions. The great history of missions, when you read biographies, what you read are people who are gripped with a global sense of God's authority.

The global sense that He is Lord of all the lords in all the tribes and King of all the little petty kings of the nations and they have ringing in their ears all authority over in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So go, make disciples of everybody. Of course they'll accuse you of being proud and arrogant to require of everybody that they bow to your religion.

Of course they're going to criticize you that way but you know that's not what you're doing. You've seen the King. The King is offering amnesty to the world in rebellion.

They don't have to perish. You have news of the payment that was made for the amnesty and the deliverance of anybody who would have it and you're willing to die that they have it. This is not pride.

This is love for the King and the knowledge that He reigns and He's going to clean house on this globe someday. He's giving us these windows of centuries to gather a great bride for Him. These are the kinds of large things that have been inside the missionary movement and have driven it for so long.

So the way I have come to put it in the book that I wrote and in sermons that I have preached at my church is that missions is not the ultimate goal of the world or of history or of God. Worship is the ultimate goal of God and of history. Missions exist because worship doesn't.

It's just a temporary stopgap measure when this age is over and all evil has been cast out, the new heavens and the new earth are in place and it is filled with the glory of the Lord like the waters cover the sea. Missions will be no more, ever again. It's just a temporary means to that, that glorious white hot worship from a worldwide people gathered under the authority of Jesus.

That's what the goal is. The goal is not missions. Missions is a means to the goal of bringing people to worship Him.

And so, we talk this way, we say worship is the fuel and the goal of missions. It's the goal because we're gathering a people into gladness in God that makes much of Him. And you can't assemble a people to be glad in God if you're not glad in God.

Which means that worship is the fuel. It gets started with my gladness in God and it aims at their gladness in God. And that in between is called missions.

William Carey, another hero. There are so many great missionaries, I'm tempted to say each is the greatest. He went in 1793, a shoemaker who learned 29 languages and he never went home.

At 11 o'clock last night, I lost two hours of work on this sermon because my faultless Mac, faulted, tested my faith, God, it's 11 o'clock, please, it's gotta be in there somewhere. Carey lost 11 years of work in a fire and knelt down and said, probably the success was going to my head. And I submit and bow and we'll start again.

So I had to deal with two hours and it tried my faith. And he just bowed, I'm sure he wept, I'm sure he said, no, no, no, I had brought some things, some dictionaries to completion and they had no backups anywhere. Well anyway, I mention him because of this quote to show that his heart and mine were driven similarly.

He said, when I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong. But amongst so many obstacles, it would die, my hope would die, unless upheld by God. Well I have God and His word is true.

Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse than it is, though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial, God's cause will triumph. That was the mindset of those missionaries at the beginning of the modern missionary era.

They savored God and His authority and His glory and His beauty and His power and His wisdom and His justice and His goodness and His truth.

They savored Him, they loved Him, they exalted in Him and then flowing out from that was, I will seek that gladness in those others, that worship in those others. So worship is the fuel and the goal of missions. Now the implication there is very controversial, namely that this is God's fuel, that is there is worship in the Godhead as they delight in each other and it is God's goal that that worship of the Godhead be extended to others.

So God is radically, passionately committed to the worship of His name. He has been doing it forever as the Father and the Son delight infinitely in each other and He means for everybody else to join Him or perish. Now this is really controversial.

I have collected over the years people who have found great difficulty, but before I show you their quotes, let me make it worse. Worse as far as they see it being worse. When I say that God's fuel is worship and God's goal is worship and thus God is radically God centered, I am not trying to be cute.

I am just trying to say in words that will somehow go home on the basis of dozens of texts. Let me read you just a few. These are texts about God's pursuit of God's glory.

He chose us for His glory. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. He predestined us under adoption to the praise of the glory of His grace, Ephesians 1.6. You are predestined so that you will praise Him.

He predestined you that you might be adopted and praise Him. He created you. Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory.

He called Israel. You are my servant Israel in whom I will be glorified. He rescued Israel from Egypt.

Yet I have saved them, yet He saved them for His namesake that He might make known His mighty power. He didn't cast them away when they said, we want a king like all the other nations. Why? Why didn't He cast them away? For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great namesake.

He restored Israel from Babylon. Why? Thus says the Lord God, it's not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I'm about to act, but for the sake of my holy name. I will vindicate the holiness of my great name and the nations will know I am Yahweh.

Jesus came to the apex of His ministry for this purpose sent by God. And now is my soul troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour.

For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name. And a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.

God knew what He was doing in bringing Jesus to the cross. He was making a name for Himself and His grace. He forgives our sins.

Why? I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake and I will not remember your sins. For your namesake, O Lord, pardon my guilt. And then it starts to spread and Herod, remember this story, was one of my son's favorite stories.

They liked violence. They liked it when braggy kings were brought down. So Herod, remember, gave an oration and did not, I'll read it to you, immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms because he did not give God the glory.

And Jesus is coming again. Why? When He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at among all the peoples, what is Jesus' ultimate goal for you? I'll read it to you from John 17, 24. Father, this is Jesus praying for you to God the Father.

Father, I desire that they also whom you have given to me may be with me where I am to see my glory. Now stop there. That's a partial list of the text.

Do you know how that sounds to people? Some people. Here's Jesus saying, I have a gift for you, me. If I came here and said that, okay, Raleigh-Durham, me, you, I hope, would walk out indignant and think I'm sick, and I would be.

So why isn't Jesus? This is not a make-believe problem. Three weeks ago, 13th of April, NPR, maybe you heard it, Fresh Air, Terry Gross, interviewing Eric Reese, who wrote an American Gospel, teaches at the University of Kentucky, said to him, I read a part of your book, may I read it, or have you read it, and then you respond? And in that part of his book, he had quoted Matthew 10, 37. This is a man who had a fundamentalist grandfather and a fundamentalist father, and he has thrown it all away, abandoned, like Bart Ehrman and others who grew up in fundamentalist homes and then something horrible happens and they throw it all away.

Eric Reese read these verses in the Bible, Jesus said, whoever loves father, I'm going to read it probably the way he heard it, okay, I'm going to make it sound bad. Whoever loves mother or father more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. And he wrote in his book, Terry Gross said this, your reaction in the book is, quote, who is the egomaniac speaking these words? So she asked him, would you comment on that? Now listen to this, you can go and listen to it right now, just go to April 13, NPR, and click on the interview with Terry Gross, you can listen to everything he said.

He said, well, it just struck me as, who is this speaking 2,000 years ago, a complete historical stranger, saying that we should love him, who we really are incapable of emotionally loving, more so than we should love our fathers and sons. It just seemed like an incredibly egomaniacal kind of claim to make. C.S. Lewis in his early days said the same thing.

Michael Prowse in the London Times a few years ago, wrote exactly the same thing. What are all these people bowed down in worship for? God doesn't need worship if he's God. The fact that I stand up here and say, the main motive for finishing the great work commission is God's passion for God, is very offensive.

And I'm saying it because it's all over the Bible, and I'm saying it because missionaries have been driven by it. God's zeal for his name among the nations is not a small theme in the Bible. It's pervasive.

So what do we make of this trouble? And I'm going to give three responses, quickly, to why... By the way, Michael Prowse, C.S. Lewis is dead, I can't do anything about that, and he got converted, but I could do something about Michael Prowse and Eric Ries. And I wrote both of them very long letters. And I'm still waiting, this was about a week ago that I wrote this letter to Eric Ries.

So if you have contact with him, say, why don't you respond to John's letter? And basically I said this kind of thing. It wasn't a critical letter at all, I said, I grew up in the same family you did. I know where you're coming from, I've tasted what you don't like.

I didn't take the turn you took, you don't have to go there. This is not a big insurmountable obstacle, there's a way over this. In fact, this becomes glory, this becomes love if you understand it.

So that's what I'm trying to help you over that obstacle right now. Three responses that say, Christ's passion for Christ in your life, and God's zeal for His name in the world is not egomania or megalomania, it is love. How so? Number one, the apex of His passion to display His glory was the cross, according to Ephesians 1.6. That in Him, His death and resurrection, we are to praise the glory, not just any old glory, the glory of His grace.

And it was infinitely costly in order to magnify the greatness of grace towards sinners like us. And yes, yes, He wants us to see the act, see the grace, and make much of the grace, not make much of ourselves. That's the first observation, the peak, the pinnacle, the apex of the demonstration of the glory of God is the demonstration of grace in an infinitely costly act for God.

He did not spare His own son. That does not solve the problem by itself, but it helps a lot, gets us on the right direction. The reason it doesn't solve the problem is because if I came to you right now, and you had a threat in your life, and somebody had a gun to your head, and in the wrestling, I got shot, and you got saved, and as I was dying, I said, my goal in this is that you admire my sacrifice.

You'd say, oh, that ruined it, but that's exactly what Jesus says, and that's what the Father says. Now, here's the difference. When it says in 1 Peter 3, 18, Christ suffered the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.

What is your joy? What is your goal? When I get shot, and you have life, I don't care how selfless I was, for you to contemplate me and make me the satisfaction of your soul would be ridiculous. I don't care how admirable it was, it wouldn't satisfy your soul. You were made for something bigger.

You were made for God. You will find your completion, and your joy, and your satisfaction forever with a growing happiness in an infinite God. So for God to say, I'm sending my Son to die for your sins, to remove every obstacle so that you can see and know Him and me, is to bring you home to joy.

It's to bring you home to infinite happiness. That completes the sacrifice argument. The reason it's love for God to exalt Himself and Christ to exalt Himself is because they are exalting the one thing for which we were made and can satisfy our souls.

And you can help unbelievers get this, you really can. There are analogies in their life, like the Grand Canyon, where they go to see it and it does something good for them, even though it makes them feel small. The world doesn't usually like to feel small.

But they go to mountains, and they go to canyons, because something is touched, and they don't know what it is. They don't have a clue what's going on, they just know it's good. I'm standing on the edge, I feel very threatened, I feel very small, very vulnerable, that's very big, and I'm happy, because they're tasting what they were made for with a little emblem of God in the canyon or the mountain.

You can communicate this to people. So that's one and two. I said there were three responses I had.

One is the pinnacle of His glory is the death of His Son and the sacrifice to cover our sin and display His glory by suffering. And so there was sacrifice for God in it. And number two was that He's bringing us to our delight, and that's loving of Him to do.

Jesus said, I'm the bread of life, who comes to me shall not hunger, but who believes in me shall never thirst. All your thirst goes away, all your hunger goes away because it's satisfied in your treasure, Jesus Christ. This is love.

It's love for Him to exalt Himself that way. Anybody else that tries to do that is cruel. Jesus is loving, because He is the goal of life, and He is the source of all satisfaction.

The third way is the story from Lazarus and Mary and Martha. I'll just read you this quickly, this could go for a whole sermon, but it has been so helpful to me. I want you to hear it.

Let me read the first six verses of John 11. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill.

So the sisters sent to Jesus saying, Lord, he whom you love, mark that word, he whom you love is ill, but Jesus said, this illness does not lead to death, it is for the glory of God. So now you've got love and you've got glory. How do they relate? That's what I'm after.

That the Son of God may be glorified through it. Verse 5. Now it's the connection between 5 and 6 that is so mind-boggling. Verse 5. Now Jesus loved, there it is again, loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Therefore, omicron, oopsalon, noon, is a real word, it's not a translation choice, merely. Therefore he stayed two days longer where he was. He loved, let me read it, I just, read it.

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, therefore when he heard Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was and let him die. Explain love in that verse, explain love. What is love? It's explicitly given to explain the nature of love.

He loved him, therefore he didn't save him from dying. Why? Reason verse 4. This illness does not lead to death, it is for the glory of God. Evidently, it is more loving to see the glory of the Son of God than to live.

And so, I don't buy it, Eric Reese. Michael Prowse, early C.S. Lewis, I don't buy it that when Jesus says whoever would come after me, let him deny himself, you must love mother and father more than me. I don't buy it that that's egomania, I say that's love.

Jesus offerings himself to us glorious, satisfying, triumphant, he, God forgive these words if they're not honoring to you, God and Christ are stuck with being God. They have no choice about being glorious, do they? I don't think so. I mean the most amazing thing in the universe is the existence of God as he is.

He didn't become anything, had no daddy, he has no genes, that's G-E-N-E-S. He might have the other kind, he's stuck with being all satisfying. He's stuck with being wonderful, he can't help it.

He just is that way, and then he is so much that way that he spills over so that his enjoyment in his fullness can become ours. This is missions, this is what we're trying to do, let the nations be glad. You know that's a quote from the Bible, let the nations be glad, that's Psalm 67 verse 4. The point is that missionaries go to nations with a message of gladness.

God Almighty is the gladdest person in the universe. He sent his son to make it possible for wicked rebellious traitors like you to get right by faith alone and have a gladness in him forever. That's infinitely wonderful because it's going to be his gladness for God in you by the Spirit.

This is our message and so it's the fuel and the goal of missions. That's motive. Now, in the time we have left, let's talk about, alright, if that's what's driving us, what do we do? What's the how? If we care about the nations, if we want them to be glad in God, what should we do? In 1988, there was an organization called ACMC and in those days it stood for the Association of Church Mission Committees and there was a lot of energy in those days.

Ralph Winter was right at the heart of it, the US Center for World Mission was right at the heart of it, churches were all thinking about how to be mission mobilized for the unreached peoples because it was being so clear since 1974 when Ralph Winter rang the bell for unreached peoples and everything started to shift around in the mission community about not just foreign fields but rather unreached peoples. So I was asked to come speak in Denver at an ACMC conference, 6 or 700 folks, and they gave me the title, namely, Prayer colon The Work of Missions. They gave it to me and I took it, I was so excited to be a part of this, and I studied it, and my first sentence as I stood before them was, Prayer, The Goal of Missions, I mean, Prayer, The Work of Missions, it's not! I don't think I made too many enemies because I brought it around in the end, which I will do here, but that is where I want to start.

Prayer movements, glorious, amen, be a part of them, but you know when you're in a movement, whether my little movement or your little movement or whatever movement you're in, you just start to overstate stuff, you know, because you want your movement to sound like the movement. Well, it isn't, and that's a little overstated, I mean, it's a lot overstated, Prayer, The Work, now why do I stumble over that? Because as I read the New Testament, preaching is the work of missions, THE work of missions, don't turn me off here, oh, you're a preacher, of course you've got to say that, you know, if you're a layman, you've got to like prayer, no, no, listen, the seed is the word of God, in the parable of the seeds, the seed is the word of God, that's where the fruit comes, Luke 8, 11, or Romans 1, 16, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, you go to the nations, you go with the gospel, it's the power of God unto salvation, the gospel, Romans 10, 17, faith comes by what?

You don't hear prayer, you hear preaching, or James 1, 18, of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, or 1 Peter 1, 23, you have been born again through the living and abiding word of God, or Acts 19, 20, summing up how the church was growing so mightily in those days, it says, so the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily, in other words, the point of the spear into an unreached heart or people group is the word of God, the gospel is the front line work of missions, now prayer is awesome in its significance, but you don't help it be more awesome by making it what it's not, just let it be what it gloriously is, and what it is, is the summons of almighty power from heaven into the word, on the word, behind the word, it's the power that wields the weapon of the word, for example, a few passages, early church, let me start with Jesus, one step back, John 17, I do not ask, he's praying to his father, I do not ask for these only, he's gathered here, he's going to pray for us, 2000 years later, I do not ask for these only, but for all those who will believe on me through their word, he's praying that, or Acts 4, 29, now, this is the early church gathered, now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch forth your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done in the name of your holy servant Jesus, so how does the word relate to prayer?

God grant us to open our mouths and be bold, don't replace the open mouth and the boldness with prayer, empower the open mouth and the boldness with prayer, or 2 Thessalonians 3:1, finally brothers, Paul says, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph, so there's the word, doing the work of missions, and grant that prayer would come in by the spirit and glorify it, speed it on, cause it to run and be glorified, or Colossians 4:3, at the same time, Paul pleads, pray for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.

One more, Ephesians 6, make a little transition here, Ephesians 6:18, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplications with all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given me, in the opening of my mouth boldly to proclaim, so you hear from all those passages the relationship between the word and prayer, in fact, in the panel that was here for just a few minutes yesterday evening, somebody asked about, what could we do to advance the revival that might be coming sovereignly, and Mark said, lift the sails, can't make the wind blow, but you can raise the sails, and I just put a twist on that and said, preach the gospel, because the Holy Spirit exists to magnify Christ through the gospel, and now all I'm adding is, and the Holy Spirit comes in answer to prayer, Holy Spirit,

come, now, in this moment, help me to get out of the way, just help me, I must speak, words must happen, words are crucial, you've appointed words to change lives, save sinners, advance the cause, but by themselves, nothing, nothing, prayer says, God, make them powerful, God, send your Holy Spirit, so prayer is the tapping into the power that wields the sword of the word, so right here in Ephesians, the last text I quoted, it's all about warfare, right, so I'm going to put prayer now in the context of warfare, life is war, here's my statement, maybe you'll remember this, because it's a little couplet, you cannot know what prayer is for until you know that life is war, and what I mean by life being war, is verses like this, fight the good fight of faith, that's 1st Timothy 6:12, take hold

on eternal life, or Paul at the end of his life in 2nd Timothy 4:7, I have fought the good fight, he's looking at his whole life when he says that, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, it's like a fight, it's like a race, it's keeping the faith, if you finish, you will have been a good warrior, if you think life is not war, you probably won't finish, now how does prayer fit in, so Ephesians 6, we all know this passage, have you ever made the connection between the armor and war, prayer, the armor and prayer, let me just give you a few snippets from Ephesians 6, start at 12, we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, you think people are your problem, they are not, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present

darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, you don't have a, I want to say a prayer, of a chance against the devil, unless you tap into God by prayer, verse 14, stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of readiness for the gospel of peace, in every circumstance the shield of faith, by which you can extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the one offensive weapon, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, comma, participle, praying, if you start a new sentence there, you miss the whole thing, take the sword of the spirit, praying, take the sword of the spirit, praying, praying at all times in the spirit, with all prayer and supplication, a preacher who

doesn't pray is powerless with his sword, may as well leave it in the scattering, and a preacher who only prays and never pulls his sword out, is powerless, prayer is not the work of missions, the sword is by which you slay the enemies and penetrate the heart of man, and it only has power because verse 18 says, take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the spirit, with all prayer and

supplication.

You cannot know what prayer is for until you know that life is war. I'll give you one other verse on this, on that particular angle, you cannot know what prayer is for until you know that life is war. What is prayer for? It's for war.

Oh really? Is that why you use it? Listen to John 15, 16, I was so stumped by this logic, until I just let it be. John 15, 16, Jesus says, you didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go, go, and bear fruit, and bear fruit, and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, now here it comes, comma, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you. Does that make sense to you? It didn't to me, at first.

I chose you, I'm commissioning you to go, like a commission, get on a mission, to bear fruit, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you. It seems backwards. Shouldn't He say, I'm giving you prayer, so that you can go and bear fruit? That's the way I'd write it.

And He didn't say that. He said, I'm giving you a mission, so that your prayers will be answered. What does that mean? It means prayer is for mission.

You cannot know what prayer is for, unless you know that life is war. It's as though the field commander, Jesus Christ, and I know the imagery here is fruit, okay, but it's here, it's really here. This idea is here.

The field commander has gone out, has taken his men, they've got an enemy, they're going to take a land, there are a lot of captives back there, that they're going to take for the general and his allegiance, and he says to the soldiers, look, here's a walkie-talkie for every one of you. And I have authority, I have been authorized, I have been authorized by the general to give you this, and there is a special code, I'm giving it to you, and you always, as long as you are in this battle, have access to him. He's got firepower.

You need him, he's there. That's prayer. And you know what American churches have done? If you wonder why prayer is powerless in your church, my church, it's because most Americans have taken a wartime walkie-talkie and turned it into a domestic intercom.

Hung it up in the den, connected with the kitchen, and if you've got a butler, you know, wherever that, where he stays, and you're down there watching videos, you've got a little upset stomach here, you know, bring me some 7-Up. Prayer loses, it malfunctions. When you take a wartime walkie-talkie and turn it into a domestic intercom, it malfunctions.

It's not made that way. It's really rugged. You hang it on your belt like a policeman, they walk in the store and they look like they're going to topple over because they've got so many gizmos hanging on them.

Well, we've got one gizmo and a sword in the battle, and you pull it out and say, I need you! I need you right now! That's what prayer is for. My kid needs you, he's walking away from Jesus. He's going to kill himself.

That's war. So, teach your people the magnificence of prayer. It's meant to empower the Word of God, and I know you run into all kinds of problems.

People ask me, you're a Calvinist, right? Yeah. Well, why do you pray? Why do you pray? Because God's already decided everything's going to happen, why do you pray? I say, well, if I want a nail in a board and I

get it set up, I don't say, I wonder why that nail's not in that board. I hit it.

Whack! That's a hammer. Hit the nail. You want the nail in the board, hit it with the hammer.

God has ordained that nails go into boards through hammers, and He's ordained that people get saved through praying. Paul prayed in Romans 10.1, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved. These are His kinsmen, according to the flesh, His Jewish people.

You've got people you care about. Take hold of God and don't let Him go. That's what prayer's for.

It's for war. It's to get captives freed. Tackle all kinds of pain in the world.

So let me give you a few textual illustrations. This might orient you in this whole issue of prayer and God's big, sovereign work. Just a few illustrations.

Matthew 24.14, promise, this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed. This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come. It's coming.

Triumph. There will be triumph. I have other sheep that are not of this fold.

I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock and one shepherd.

It's going to happen. The mission will not fail. The word doesn't come back empty.

And yet, He commissions us to pray. Listen to these prayers. Your kingdom come.

You think that's in doubt? No, you don't. You don't think it's in doubt that the kingdom of God is going to come? And Jesus says every day, pray it every day, because you've got give us this day our daily bread in the prayer. I presume the prayer is to be prayed every day.

So pray every day, thy kingdom come. Why? It's coming. It's coming through prayer.

It says in Revelation 8 that there's a bowl in front of God, full of incense, the prayers of the saints. One day, it's going to take this up and go whooah on the earth. Do you know how many, what, billions of times the prayer, thy kingdom come, has ascended to heaven? I have the conviction not one of them has been wasted.

When it gets to 10 trillion, or whatever number the Lord has appointed, the bowl will be full. And every one of those prayers prayed for the last 2,000 years will be answered when he throws his triumph on the earth. God has made prayer a means of his kingdom's coming.

And the kingdom is surely going to come. Or another example, what about salvation? I've already illustrated that, but I'll give it anyway. Acts 13.48, when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

And as many as were appointed to eternal life, believed. As many as were appointed to eternal life, believed. So clearly God has chosen who's going to believe.

So they say, why pray? I mean if there's predestination, if God has chosen who's going to believe, why pray? And the answer is, that's the way he gets the nails in the board. Why would you, why would you

drop out? Why would you not want to be used? Why would you not want to be a part of the causality of salvation? Why wouldn't you want the significance of someday being thanked by a saved person, that your prayer was the 1,080th prayer of mom and dad and you that broke through? Why wouldn't you want to be a part of that? It's so, I don't want to say evil, I'll just say thoughtless of people to say that because he ordains what comes to pass, he doesn't use means as essential. Essential! If you don't use the hammer, the nail won't go in.

And that's not a compromise of the sovereignty of God. Just one last verse before we say a few concluding things on suffering. One last verse on prayer.

One of those, a lot of verses boggle my mind. You think I get boggled? I get boggled a lot. So here's another piper, boggler.

I mean, I assume you're boggled too. Matthew 9,37. Then Jesus said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

Father give me a break. You own the farm, you are absolutely the Lord of the harvest. You are the expert in farming.

You know exactly how many hands on the farm it takes to get the harvest in. I live on the edge in the servant quarters and I don't know anything. I'm so stupid when it comes to global realities and the nature of the church and the doing of missions.

Why are you telling me to ask you for workers? You know how many workers it's going to take. Isn't that weird? That's weird. An infinite, omniscient, sovereign God turns to his servants on the edge of the farm and says, would you want to ask me to provide more laborers here? I mean, the only sense I can make out of that is God really wants you involved.

I mean, really. Help me run this universe. Tell me what you want me to do.

He knows what needs to be done. He's not stupid. He's not waiting around thinking I don't know what to do.

I need people. He doesn't need people. He blesses people with causality.

He draws them in to wield hammers and swords. And we, for whatever theological or personal reasons, we shouldn't say, well, I find that to be a problem. I don't think I want to be a part of that because it seems inconsistent logically.

You can go there if you want. I'm not going there. I'm saying, really? Really? Butan might be reached if I get on my knees and ask for shame to go there with his wife.

Really? I could have a hand in that? Oh, yes. Well, don't let your theology get in the way of the Bible, okay? Okay, last, here's the connection. This participation, he said, yeah, I want to participate.

Yeah, right. It's going to cost you your life. All right, that's where we're closing.

We're on the suffering piece right now. We've given word and prayer and motive and now here we are ending on just a few minutes of what it will cost us. And we're soft.

I mean, believe me, we're soft. And I want you to toughen up a little bit. God gives you toughness when you need it.

And it's good to get ready. And I only say it because Jesus said so many things about getting ready. If we're in a war, if you cannot know what prayer is for, unless you know that life is war, we're not playing war games.

Eternity is at stake. Our enemy hates us. He is 10,000 times stronger than we are.

Eternity hangs in the balance. The war lasts a long time. There are no breathers.

Are you going to go on vacation this summer? We are. The month of July is called vacation. Guess who doesn't go on vacation? The devil.

He can kill a pastor on vacation. Undo him. He never stops.

You can't let up. There is no vacation from war. There's only relief at the end.

So here we are in war, big time, and war has casualties. It just so happens that in the kingdom, all the casualties are wounds and not ends. You die, but you live.

So here are a few statements as to why the suffering is so necessary in the finishing of the Great Commission. Number one, and I've got ten, but I'm only going to give you whatever I have time for. I'm going to give you a few.

Number one, Jesus suffered and said we would. John 15, 20, Remember the word that I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.

If they kept my word, they'll keep yours. We are not greater than Jesus. Jesus came into the world to suffer.

He said, As the Father has sent me, so send I you. It is built in. If you come to Jesus, you come to suffer.

No escape. Number two, because Paul said there's no other way home. Acts 14, this is Discipleship 101 as he returns to the little baby churches.

After they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, saying, saying, it's the only thing we're told about what discipleship involves in those churches, the only thing, saying through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom. You ever led anybody to Jesus? Tell them about three minutes later, many tribulations on the way. Number three, Peter said it's the normal path of blessing.

1 Peter 4, 12, Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes upon you, which comes upon you for testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you. It's not strange, but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed.

Number four, because Paul said it's the normal cost of godliness, and you can't do missions if you're not pursuing godliness. 2 Timothy 3, 12, Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be

persecuted. These are not ifs, these are givens.

Number five, because in suffering he is refining our faith. Listen to how he treated Paul. Listen to how the Lord treated His beloved Paul.

2 Corinthians 1.8, For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia. We were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life. Indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

Whose purpose was that? It wasn't the devil's. It was God's design. God brought him to the brink of death to strip him of all self-reliance.

And Paul didn't get mad at him. In fact, Paul rejoiced. I'm going to skip some, see if I can find that one.

There it is, number nine. This is just a continuation of that. Listen to 2 Corinthians 12.9. Got the thorn in the flesh, right? Jesus gave it to him to keep him from being too conceited.

And three times he says, God, please take it away. God, please take it away. God, in the name of your Son, Jesus, it hurts.

Please take it away. And this is what he then says. He said to me, Jesus said to me, My grace is sufficient for you.

My power is perfected in weakness. We can imagine Eric Reese responding to this, or Michael Prowse, or early C.S. Lewis, or maybe you. It hurts.

You're going to make your power look perfect in my pain. What kind of God are you? He didn't respond like that. Listen to how he responded.

Most gladly, therefore, will I rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. That's a Copernican revolution of emotions. His joy has moved so profoundly from his own private comforts into the glory of Jesus, that when Jesus says the reason you're going through this is because my power will be perfected in you, and people will make more of me when they see how you are satisfied in me, in spite of your pain that I am bringing you, and I will be lifted up.

Paul says, Yes! Yes! That's why I'm on the planet, and I want others to see. Maybe close with this one. Jesus said, You are the salt of the earth.

If the salt has lost its flavor, it's good for nothing to be thrown out and trampled on your feet by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a lampstand. May give light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Now, here's my question. Salt, light, see, give glory to God, not you. Why are they giving glory to God, not you, when you did the good work? That's a huge question.

How do you do good works according to that verse without getting attention mainly for yourself and not God? That's a huge issue in missions, and in cities, and in churches, and in families. My answer is to just back up a few verses and start at verse 11, not at verse 14. So here we go.

Blessed are you when men persecute you and revile you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, because so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the air.

You think there's any connection there? I do. What's salty about you? What is salty about you that people would go, where did that come from? That's good. That's really unusual.

That's strange and wonderful. I think it's joy in the midst of suffering. Blessed are you when men persecute you and revile you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely.

Rejoice in that day, for great is your reward. Name me Jesus in heaven. You are the salt of the earth.

People taste that. People taste that. Don't they? You go lay your life down in Afghanistan and endure all kinds of disease and privation and maintain hope and joy in God, people are going to say, I've never tasted anything quite like that.

Mom and Dad might finally come around. They watch you do that long enough. Granddad, grandmama, they might come around if they see the light and taste the salt, which I think good deeds are the form it takes, this light, but what makes it tangy is it's costing you something and you're not losing your joy in Him, in Him, and that's why people glorify Him.

They can't explain why your heart is content in the midst of this mess of missions. Let me see if I can sum it up. The task of missions is that we be like Paul and penetrate more and more unreached peoples.

The foundation of all that work is Jesus came into the world to die for sinners, rise again, and the gospel could spread so that whoever believes might have eternal life and not perish. The motive is the glory of God in the gladness of the nations. It begins with the gladness right in here in the glory and the gladness going out there to the nations.

The cost, it will cost you everything. It will cost you your life. Whoever would come after me, let him forsake, what's the word? Oh shoot.

Deny, I'm talking Luke 14, 33. Renounce, renounce all that he has or you can't be my disciple. So I'm saying it costs you your life.

Everything is His and it may cost you your literal life and the reward everlasting joy in Jesus forever. So be biblically missional, meaning pursue the gladness of the nations, especially the ones that are not yet reached. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, help me to live up to these words. I don't nearly to the level that I want to. It's so good for me to hear this.

I'm so desperately needy of praying like this, loving nations like this, being thrilled with you like this, being ready to sacrifice like this. It's not the way I'm wired except for the precious Holy Spirit beginning a process of remaking the old selfish John Piper. So I pray that for everybody now.

God we want to be more like this for the sake of the nations and for the sake of our cities and for the sake of our churches and our families. I ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

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