

Missions and the Glory of God's Name

Our Missions Commitment

By Steve Fernandez

Recently I was struck by a comment made by John Piper concerning the missions commitment of the local church and its relation to the name and glory of God. His words were: *"If you say that you love the glory of God, the test of your authenticity is whether you love the spread of that glory among all the peoples of the world."*¹ That statement hit me like a truck! It was a wake up call. How can I, as a preacher of the Word of God, say I am passionately committed to the glory of God in all I do and yet not be passionately committed to spreading that glory in the world? I would pose the same question to you. How can you say that as a Christian you are committed to God's glory, but you are at the same time not committed to spreading His glory in the world? Now, of course, these are questions related to the work of missions and the spread of the gospel.

To grasp the significance of this, we must begin by looking at God's passionate concern for His own name and glory. To start with, His decision to save a people was for the express purpose of proclaiming His name. Concerning Israel, God says that they are, *"the people whom I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise."* (Isaiah 43:21) Of the church Peter says, *"You are a chosen race. . .that you may declare the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* (I Peter 2:9) His dealings with men in general are also designed to proclaim His name. For example, He prolonged His dealings with Pharaoh for this very reason. His words to Pharaoh were: *"But indeed for this cause I have allowed you to remain in order to show you My power; in order to proclaim My name through all the earth."* (Exodus 9:16) The Psalmist, speaking of the Exodus, says the same thing when he says: *"Our fathers. . .did not remember the abundance of Your steadfast love, but rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet, He saved them for His name's sake that He might make known His mighty power."* (Psalm 106:7-8) His deliverance of His people is also rooted in His passionate desire to see His name and glory made known. God speaking through Ezekiel concerning Israel's restoration says: *"They profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, "These are the people of the Lord; yet they had come out of His land." But I had concern for My name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: "it is not for your sake, O House of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name. . .and I will vindicate the holiness of my great name."* (Ezekiel 36:20-23) In the New Testament, Jesus in His directives on how we should pray, begins by saying, *"pray in this way; Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name."* (Matthew 6:9) In other words, we are to pray with this design: that God would work to cause people to sanctify His name; to esteem, regard, cherish, and praise His great name. As we can see over and over in Scripture from beginning to end, God asserts His concern to make His name and glory known. It is the motive for all He does.

This naturally leads us to the concept of God's name and glory in Scripture. Why is God so committed to making His name known? What does the concept of His name mean? The basic idea of *"name"* is reputation, renown, or fame. In Scripture God's name is connected with His glory and praise. Speaking through Jeremiah, God says: *"I made*

Israel. . .that they might be for Me a people, a name, a praise and glory, but they would not listen." (Jeremiah 13:11) Speaking through Isaiah, God says: "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath and, for My praise I restrain it for you in order not to cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver. I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake I will act; For my own sake I will act; for how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another." (Isaiah 48:9-11) God's name in Scripture is all He is in His majestic person. It involves His eternal, self-existent, all-sufficient being. He owes His existence to no one. When there was no universe He already is. He is dependent on no one. He has never needed counsel nor learned anything. (Exodus 3:14) He is a great God Who needs no one and only created to display Himself to creation. (Romans 11:33-36) It also involves His glorious natural attributes of power and wisdom, as well as His moral attributes, such as holiness and love displayed to vile sinners. To some holiness is displayed in wrath. To others love is displayed in mercy. (Romans 9:22,23; Ephesians 1:6, 12; 2:4)

So we can see that God's name concerns His reputation, His glory, and His praise. This is the foundation of missions. The bedrock of missions is not the value of man. It is the spread of God's glory. The biblical commitment to evangelism and missions is rooted in God's passionate concern to make His name known. This is seen in Revelation 5. John, revealing the scene in heaven in which the Lamb takes the Book out of the hand of Him Who sits on the throne, says, "and they sang a new song saying, "Worthy art Thou, to take the book, and to break its seals: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." It goes on to say, "and every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen". And the elders fell down and worshipped." (Revelation 5:9, 13-14) Christ, having purchased men from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, is now worshipped and His name is glorified and praised. The climactic and final objective of missions, then, is the spreading and glorifying of Christ's name to every "tribe and tongue and nation, and people." This is His passionate concern. It must also be ours. A church that says no to missions is not just saying no to men. It is not just a matter of leaving men in their sins. It is saying no to God's greatest concern: the spreading of His glorious name among the peoples of the world. This is His passionate concern; it must be ours. This is the foundational conviction that constrains us in all that we do for missions. Our prayer is that God would cause you to open your heart to the spreading of His great name to the nations. To love missions, is to love the spread of God's glory. It is to love God. God speaking through Isaiah says: "And I will set a sign among them and will send survivors among them to the nations; to the distant coastlands that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations." (Isaiah 66:19) Remember, when it comes to world missions, there are only three kinds of Christians: zealous goers, zealous senders, and disobedient. Which will you be?

¹ Driving Convictions Behind Missions at Bethlehem Baptist Church - 1996