

January 27, 2007

Living to Make the Nations Glad in God through the Gospel

If you are a Christian, there are two commandments and one great commission that define our lives. The two commandments are **'Love God supremely – and love your neighbor as yourself.'** And the great commission is **'Go and make disciples'**. If you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself then you cannot be indifferent to the great purpose of God in the world – to call out from among every tribe, and nation and people and tongue a people for His own – and your own part in that calling. If you love God supremely, then your neighbor's welfare becomes your concern, and you will lay down your own life to make them eternally glad in God. These two commandments and one directive give definition and focus and purpose and meaning to our lives.

Back in December I shared with you what God had spoken to me while I was in Kenya last November and I want to remind you again of that because that word has really defined the direction I sense the Lord leading us as a church. I want to spend this year taking us through the heart of the gospel in the New Testament – Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians – and letting the word of God ignite our hearts with a passion for His purpose in the world – at home and abroad. So this morning is just an introduction to that and I want to start by restating briefly what I spoke last December.

- 1) **We were created to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.**
This is the part about loving God supremely. We were meant to worship and enjoy the God who made us. If we miss this – we miss what this life is all about.
- 2) **We have been commissioned by Christ to spend our lives making others eternally glad in God.**
This is the part about loving our neighbor as ourself. Love is the accurate estimation and adequate supply for another's need – and the accurate estimation is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the adequate supply is the gospel of Jesus Christ to meet that need in every man, woman and child.
- 3) **We are called by Jesus to cultivate a lifestyle that reflects our everlasting enjoyment in God by risking temporal loss for eternal gain.**
This is the part about going and making disciples. It is not enough that we should be washed in the precious blood of the Lamb and enjoy God in our lives – but that enjoyment should compel us to risk everything in this life for the sake of the gospel. I pray that Christ would free us from the seduction of security – that He would release us from the paralyzing effects of comfort and ease – that He would explode the myth of safety and ignite our hearts to risk it all for the sake of Christ. I pray that none of us would in the end have to cover our face and say 'I've wasted it.'
- 4) **We must set ourselves as a church toward the goal of reaching the nations with the gospel.**
I want you to understand that when I talk about reaching the nations with the gospel I am talking about your unsaved friend, relatives and neighbors, and also about hometown missions of mercy and overseas cross-cultural missions. We need to be massively engaged in all these arenas. The core of the gospel is this: *'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.'* 2 Corinthians 8:9 It was for our sake and the sake of all those that have gone before and those yet unborn, that He spent the capital of heaven lavishly to secure our enjoyment of God. **The salvation we enjoy and proclaim to others is a ministry of those who have been made rich, spending their wealth so that those who are poor might be made rich.**

Therefore I want us as a church to be engaged in the great work of God like never before. I want to see everyone of those who call this place home spending their lives, their time, their wealth and energy in the work missions of mercy at home, and cross-cultural missions abroad. My prayer is that Summit Christian Fellowship would impact not only this corner but this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ – that we would be those living to make the nations glad in God through the gospel. To begin this series, I want us to look at Psalm 67. I believe that this Psalm is the expression of how a person prays who is wholly committed making the nations glad in God through the Gospel.

Psalm 67

God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us--that Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; let all the peoples praise Thee. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for Thou wilt judge the peoples with uprightness, and guide the nations on the earth. Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; let all the peoples praise Thee. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

I think we can glean at least four crucial truths from this passage:

God's intention is that He would be known and praised and enjoyed and feared among all the nations

God wants people to know that He is a God of justice, power and grace

God blesses us so that the nations will be blessed

God will bless us as we set ourselves to bless the nations

These four points will be familiar to those of you who have been engaged in our study of John Piper's book, *Don't Waste Your Life*. I trust that you have, as I have been, greatly impacted by this little study.

God's intention is that He would be known and praised and enjoyed and feared among all the nations.

This Psalm teaches that God's purpose is to be known, and praised and enjoyed and feared among all the nations.

Known - *that Thy way may be known on the earth,*

To know God intimately is to know His way on the earth – that is, how He deals with His creation. In Psalm 103:7, the psalmist tells us that *[God] made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel*. To know the ways of God is deeper than merely knowing His acts. Israel only knew God through the miraculous things that He did – and they quickly forgot each time. It reminds me of the old adage among pastors – 'You're only as good as your last sermon.' Israel was delivered by God's mighty hand from an oppressive regime in Egypt – and before they even got out of the country – they were doubting God. They cried out and He delivered them once again – parted the Red Sea – and they sang and danced as the Egyptians drowned – and then three days later they were grumbling and complaining that they had no water.

If we only know God as a miraculous deliverer – and have not gone deeper in our relationship – we don't really know God. When Jesus fed the five thousand, they wanted to make Him king – but when He talked about the cost of discipleship – most people left. When He came into Jerusalem on a donkey – they crowded around Him by the thousands – but when He went to the cross – they were conspicuous by their absence. You see, they knew His acts – turning water into wine, healing lepers and lame men, opening blind eyes and deaf ears – but they didn't know His ways – they didn't understand that He had to die – so that they might live. God's intention is that His ways would be known among the people.

Praised - *Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; let all the peoples praise Thee.*

The heavens are ringing right now with the praises of saints and angels before the throne and God's intention is that we on earth would join in that great chorus – now and through eternity. Wherever you look in the book of Revelation when John is describing the scenes in heaven – what you see is praise and adoration of God. And it is praise and adoration that springs from knowing God – and since God is an infinite God – and heaven lasts forever – there will be unending discoveries about God that will generate even more praise and adoration from His people. Heaven will be full of *"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."* 1 Corinthians 2:9

Enjoyed - *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy;*

God's intention is that we would glorify and enjoy Him forever. He truly wants His creation to be glad in Him and sing for joy.

Feared - *that all the ends of the earth may fear Him*

Here I believe the word fear is used in the sense of causing astonishment and awe, and in the sense of inspiring godly fear – that is a fear of doing or saying something that would cause us to lose the sense of God's presence and person. God is not saying that He wants people to be terrified of Him, but rather that the prospect of losing any connection with this wonderful God would keep us from doing those things that would banish us from His presence. This is why sin is so wretched and crippling – it keeps us from the very presence of God – from knowing Him intimately – from praising and worshipping Him with that white-hot fervor He deserves – from being made glad in Him and rejoicing in Him.

God wants people to know that He is a God of justice, power and grace.

This passage also teaches that what God wants people to know, praise, enjoy and fear about Him is that He is a God of justice, power and grace.

Justice - *Thou wilt judge the peoples with uprightness*

God wants people to know Him as a God of justice. If there is one attitude that is common to the human condition – it is the thirst for justice – the desire for fairness. No one likes a cheater – cheating and injustice are universally condemned. And when it comes to judgment – God is eternally just. God is not partial: *For there is no partiality with God.* Romans 2:11 *For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.* Deuteronomy 10:17 When it comes to judging the nations, no one will be judged on the color of his skin, the size of his fortune or the place he holds in society. There will be no bribes accepted or plea bargaining deals – everything will rest on God's unimpeachable righteousness – there will be no cheating here.

Power – [Thou wilt] *guide the nations on the earth.*

God also wants us to know that He is a God of sovereign power – He runs the universe and everything in it – even His most implacable enemy, Satan, only serves God's invincible purpose in the world. *All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and {among} the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'* Daniel 4:34 *and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,* Acts 17:26 *The king's heart is {like} channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.* Proverbs 21:1

Grace - *God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us*

God wants us to know that He is a God of grace. That is, He is a God who saves us by His grace, who keeps us by His grace and will bring us to glory one day by His grace. He is a God of truth as He judges the nations with justice – a God of power as He deals with the universe in sovereign power – and a God of grace as He stoops from heaven to rescue us from hell.

God blesses us so that the nations will be blessed

This I believe is the main point of the this prayer - God blesses us so that the nations will be blessed *God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us--that Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations.* The blessing of God we pray for comes to us for the sake of the nations. We miss it if our prayer is bent in any other direction. This is what God told Abraham in Genesis 12: *And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."* And Isaiah records that God told Israel that: *'I will give you as a light to the nations – that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'* Isaiah 49:6

This is the fundamental truth we need to understand about the blessing of God. God blesses us **so that** the nations will be blessed. We need our thinking renewed about the blessing of God. Too often we treat God as our sugar daddy – asking for blessing so that we would have more money – or a better house or a better life or more happiness or more whatever for me. But God blesses for the sake of the nations. You read through the Bible and you will see God blessing His people for the purpose of blessing the nations with salvation. God is not somehow using us – it is because He loves the nations and it is because He knows that our highest joy comes from knowing Him. And when our joy in Him invades the lives of others – our joy becomes full.

God will bless us as we set ourselves to bless the nations

Finally, God will bless the church that is pouring itself out to reach the nations. First of all the psalmist prays: *God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us--that Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations.* And then he ends his prayer with: *The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him. His river of blessing for you and for me is for the purpose of causing the nations to know Him, praise Him, enjoy Him and fear Him.* God intends that the fame of His name would spread to every people, tribe, language and culture on the earth – and so the church that enters into this great purpose will necessarily have the blessing of God poured out on it.

My constant prayer is:

***that our hearts together would be ignited with a passion for the triumph of God in the world
that everything in our lives would testify that Jesus is more precious than life
that our lives would not be wasted in trivial pursuits and prove to be a tragedy and not a triumph
that we would be those who cultivate a lifestyle that risks temporal loss for eternal gain.
that we who have been made glad in God would live to make others glad in Him through the gospel.***

I do not anticipate that every one of us will be called to some cross-cultural mission field for the sake of the gospel – but I do expect that every one of us to be engaged in the mission of the gospel – whether it is a hometown mission of mercy – like CareNet, Love Inc., Friends and Servants – or a cross cultural frontier mission in another land. I expect all of us to be actively participating in go and sending for the purpose of making the nations glad in God through the gospel. May the Lord impact our hearts with the joy and the glory of causing His name to be worshiped and praised and honored in the earth!

Our gracious God and Savior,

Grant that we would make it our ambition to be engaged in Your great purpose to be known and praised and enjoyed and feared among the nations. Forgive us Father, for our selfish attention to only what concerns us and for prayers that seek to bless and enhance only our lives. Give us we pray, a heart that matches Yours in the pursuit of joy for all peoples through the gospel. May our prayers be filled with the kind of asking that brings blessings on the nations. Forbid it Lord that we should waste our lives on ourselves – but rather be poured out as a drink offering for the sake of those who are perishing. May all our time and energy, our passion and wealth be enslaved to the cause of Christ in the world, we pray in the precious, life-giving name of Jesus, Amen.

**May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto You.
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.**