

Proclaiming the Excellencies of Christ, Not Prosperity, Among the Nations

by John Piper

True biblical missions involves a willingness to die to one's own desires and cravings, living simply and giving lavishly, and suffering as a means to faithful proclamation.

Duration: 41:28

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Peter 2:9-12

Topics: "Missions Work", "Divine Calling"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the calling to missions and how God reveals this calling to His missionaries. He emphasizes that this calling cannot be explained or controlled by humans, but only by God. The speaker shares examples of individuals who have been called to serve as missionaries in various places, highlighting the supernatural nature of this calling. He also emphasizes the importance of proclaiming the excellencies of God and the marvel of being called out of darkness into His marvelous light. The sermon concludes with a plea for faithfulness in holding the ropes for those who are sacrificing their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org. The scripture text for the sermon is 1 Peter 2, 9-12. 1 Peter 2, verse 9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Father, the men from the men's retreat are with us to hear that little part of the message. The folks tonight at the North Campus are here with us.

The folks at the South Side are here and the downtown Sunday morning site are here. We're all here at this moment. All of us have just watched half of our missionary families and singles be paraded across the

screen and we have felt, at least I have felt, rising up inside of me a trembling, tearful, Oh God, keep me faithful.

Don't let my hands ever grow weary in holding the ropes for hundreds and hundreds of children and families laying their life down for King Jesus. Don't let Bethlehem ever become so satisfied, so content, so comfortable, we just forget about the nations and all those emissaries we have sent among them. Oh Father, keep us faithful.

And then there rises up in me the sense that you mean on this weekend to call hundreds to missions or confirm the calling of the wavering to missions, cross-cultural, long-term. So I'm asking that you do it. Pray the Lord of the Harvest that he would send out laborers into his harvest.

That's what I'm doing right now with thousands of people, Lord. Praying to the Lord of the Harvest that you would send. That is a mystery.

Nobody knows how you do that. We just want to be used in the miracle of sending. How shall they call upon Him whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent? God do it, I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. This message was originally conceived in missions focus as a response to the prosperity gospel. Or as it's sometimes called the health, wealth and prosperity gospel.

This distortion of the gospel is blatant among prominent TV preachers, some of them. But what makes it relevant for missions is that this distorted gospel is one of the largest and most tragic exports that America takes to the two-thirds world, especially Africa. This so-called gospel says, to quote Kenneth Copeland, one of its founders, There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's word.

Faith causes them to function. They will work when they are put to work and they will stop working when the force of faith is stopped. What is so sadly obvious and prominent is that material prosperity is what is meant.

Not spiritual prosperity learned through hardship. One of the more contemporary representatives of this movement simply says, quote, God desires us to become wealthy for him. Now, there is so much to say in response to this alternative mission, this alternative gospel, which is no gospel.

However, as I've prepared and thought about this, it has seemed to me that that response to that is receding into the background of what I have to say. And coming to the foreground is a positive, forthright biblical encouragement for you to give your life to true biblical missions. And I will leave the criticism for a little bit later in the message and then for some perhaps online writings, the blog maybe.

At the heart of true biblical missions is the willingness to die to the cravings exploited by prosperity preachers. Hear that? At the heart of true biblical missions is the readiness, willingness to die to the cravings exploited by prosperity preachers. At the heart of true biblical missions is an eagerness to live simply and give lavishly.

Not live lavishly. Do you share that, senders? Or have you been caught up more and more and more stuff? The more you make, the more you buy, right? Wrong. The more you make, the more you give, right? True biblical missions has at his heart suffering.

Not simply as a result of faithful proclamation, but a means to faithful proclamation. God has ordained according to Colossians 1.24 that the suffering of his emissaries will be his sufferings for others to see and know how much they're loved. There's no option.

We suffer or we're not faithful. That's the calling. Take up your cross.

Follow me. It's a Calvary road. Through many afflictions, we must enter the kingdom.

If you live a godly life in Christ Jesus, you will be persecuted. If they call the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they call his servants? There is no option. We don't preach comfort.

We preach not prosperity. When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die. It's extremely hard to be a Christian in America, let alone be a missionary who leaves America.

1 Peter 2.9 has a surprise in it for us. Cross-cultural, global missions stands out in a surprising way from verse 9 of 1 Peter 2. Let me read it for you. And we'll work our way to the surprise.

You are a chosen race. Now he's talking to those who have put their faith in Christ. You are a chosen race.

A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people for God's own possession.

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Now you may say, I would say if I were you, not having thought what I've thought, what's surprising about that? It's pretty obviously relevant for missions. Last clause.

That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. That's what missionaries do, isn't it? Nothing surprising there. What do you mean there's a surprise in this verse? Well, yes, but that's what all of us do.

This is not a definition of missions. This is a definition of Christianity. We haven't defined missions yet.

This is about you. Every one of you who believes in Jesus have been called out of darkness into light that you may tell about the excellencies of the one who called you. That's Christianity.

That's not missions. So we haven't seen it yet. Missions is hearing God's leading to cross a culture, learn a language, proclaim his excellencies, and plant a church where it doesn't exist.

That's missions. It's a glorious calling, an absolutely glorious calling. Not all of us are so privileged.

I'm not. I don't have that calling yet. Most of you don't.

Most of you shouldn't. Some of you do. That's what this service is about.

How do you know? You listen. You think, you pray, you look, and God does it. And nobody can explain it.

I don't know who you are. I don't know who you are. But you will know.

I want to make this a little clearer that not everybody is called to do this. Paul is on his way to Spain as he writes the book of Romans. Romans is a missionary support letter before he leaves.

I'll read you from chapter 15, verse 20. I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named. I don't.

He does. Most of you don't and shouldn't. Some of you should.

Who are you? That's the question tonight. I'll keep reading. I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named.

Since I no longer have any room for work in these regions. The only reason he said that is because he's called to preach where the gospel hasn't been preached. I have no room in these present regions.

I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you. You're not going with me. But, oh, you've got to get behind me or I'll be undone without your prayers, without your clothes, without your money.

If you can send a visitor to encourage me, you've got to get behind me. Now, there's the cleavage. Some send and some go and the goers are called missionaries in our vocabulary.

It's a glorious calling and only a few have it. And I'm out to help you find out who they are. And whether you're among them.

Some of you are and you don't yet know it. That's the arrangement. Some send, some go.

It's always been that way. It'll always be that way till Jesus comes. God has a way of making known to his missionaries who you are.

Who you are. It's amazing to watch it happen. I've been here 28 years.

It's amazing to watch it happen. Nobody can explain this. Nobody can explain this call to missions.

You can't quantify it. You can't control it. You can't manipulate it.

I can't make it happen. Nobody's got a handle on this but God Almighty. I've watched it happen.

It's absolutely magnificent to watch it happen. A businessman, a worker in Foot Locker. And the tree starts to get moving.

The wife starts to feel the moving too. Mission focus after mission focus. It gets looser until it's done.

And they've been out for 15 years. I'm talking about the Decker's. I can, I could send you.

I won't name these. Might be a little bit. I could send you to two families that I can think of right now.

Who can point to the pew and the date where they crossed the line. They were business people. And now they're in hard places.

Laying their lives down. Nobody can explain this. And I don't want those of you who stay and send to feel like you've been cheated.

Although I'm tempted to feel that way myself at times. In fact, just say this again. I always say this every year.

I don't know if I'm going to be here forever. Meaning behind this pulpit while I live. I know I won't be here forever.

But I mean while I live, I don't know if I'm standing here. Because I say to God while I'm singing down there. All of you singing.

I'm saying, God, anything. Anything, anything. Do anything to keep me faithful.

Don't let me ever miss your leading. Please, God. Don't let me get so comfortable in this role.

That I can't hear you're finishing in another place. Help me. You pray that way? Oh, I hope you do.

I hope every single Christian in this church says, God, anywhere, anytime, I will follow. Don't let me miss it. Do whatever you have to do to get my attention.

I don't care. Chop an arm off. I mean it.

I'm going to be in heaven in just a few years. I'm going to give an account for my life. Just a few years.

I'll see him. What? The only thing that matters is, did I follow faithfully? Or did I just hold on to comforts and securities and power and influence and blah, blah, blah. To hell with it all.

Come on, Lord. Break in. Do what you have to do to this sinner man.

The wind blows where it wills. Nobody can figure this out. It's blowing in these rooms.

It's blowing in these rooms right now. God does it. The rest of us have our work to do.

Do we not? And knowing that many are called and depend on us will change everything. A lot of lifestyles are going to change. Read the Desiring God blog tomorrow morning, please.

It's already posted to go up at 6 o'clock tomorrow morning. And I wrote this sentence, which came out of a prayer meeting on Friday. Ed was there, heard the sentence.

The worst of times, the worst of all times is the best of all times for missions. And I'm thinking the financial crisis mainly. The worst of all times is the best of all times for missions.

Read the blog and find out why I believe that was from God. Now, we haven't gotten to the surprise yet. I said verse 9 of 1 Peter 2 has a surprising way to show us cross-cultural missions.

Let's look at the surprise. The surprise emerges when you take 1 Peter 2.9 and you put it beside Revelation 5.9 and 10. Because the parallels are striking.

And Revelation 5.9 sheds a light back on 1 Peter 2.9 that changes everything. Okay? So you can put your finger in both of those if you'd like. 1 Peter 2.9 and Revelation 5.9, I'll read them back to back.

1 Peter 2.9, just the first half of the verse. You, that is you who trust Christ, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. Got that? Revelation 5.9 and 10.

This is a glimpse into heaven after this age is over, after the Great Commission is finished. And they sang a new song saying, Worthy are you, this is the Lamb of God. Worthy are you, O Lamb of God who was slain, to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood, this is what happened

when he died, this is why he died, by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on earth.

Notice, nation in 1 Peter 2.9 links with nation, every nation in Revelation 5.9. People in 1 Peter 2.9 links with people in Revelation 5.9. Priesthood in 1 Peter 2.9 links with priests in Revelation 5.10. And royal, royal priesthood, royal in 1 Peter 2.9 links with kingdom and reign in Revelation 5.10. In other words, in both of these texts, God has made for himself a royal, kingly, reigning priesthood. It's called a royal priesthood in 2.9 and in Revelation 5.10 it's called, you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign as kingly priests on the earth. So, Revelation 5.9 makes something crystal clear that 1 Peter 2.9 only hinted at.

This kingdom of priests, this royal priesthood will be made up of persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You see that in verse 9? You bought these, you bought these, they will be brought. And when they're brought, they're going to make a priesthood, kingly priesthood, a royal priesthood, reigning priesthood, just like 1 Peter 2.9 says.

So, when 1 Peter 2.9 says, you're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, one race, one nation, one people, one priesthood, it means that that new race is made up of every race. And that new people, one people, is made up of every people. And that new nation, one nation, holy, is made up of every nation.

And that one royal priesthood that will reign with Jesus, have personal access to God, sit on the throne with God, will be made up of converts from every religion and priesthood on the face of the earth. Jesus is not a tribal deity. He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

And the surprising thing is that cross-cultural global missions stands out from 1 Peter 2.9 because at the close of the age, that chosen race, that royal priesthood, that holy nation, that one people will be composed of all races, all nations, all peoples, and they're only gathered by missionaries. Meaning, the church doesn't exist in a people group until there's a missionary. There is no other way it happens.

None! Missions is at the heart of what God is doing, forming a new race, forming a new nation, forming a new people, forming a new priesthood from all the nations, from all the peoples, from all the nations and races and priesthoods. God is jealous for them all. You see that word every in Revelation 5.9? You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

He bought them by His blood. He will have them. That's the inheritance referred to in Psalm 2. A blood-bought inheritance exists.

There are children of God scattered throughout the world. They hear the gospel and they know the voice of the shepherd and they follow Him. But they cannot follow whom they have not heard and they will not follow and they will perish without a missionary.

Long before there was a financial crisis, a united global financial crisis in New York and Tokyo and Paris which has made globalization so obviously meaningful for the first time for some of us because the word is so difficult to get your hands around and now it is so easy to get your hand around because all the banks borrow from each other and they all go down together. Before that ever happened and globalization was made crystal clear as it is today, God globalized the church. Thousands of years ago, He just globalized it.

And then He called these strange and wonderful people called missionaries to make it happen. And it doesn't happen any other way. You think it does.

I know some of you are sitting there trying to go, there's got to be another way. He's missing something. Like radio? Radio.

Internet. There are 6,850 peoples with fewer than 2% evangelical Christians in the world. There are 13,000 ethno-linguistic people groups in the world.

Thirteen total. Ethno-linguistic. There are more if you bring in other kinds of cultural factors.

But if you just take ethno-linguistic definitions, 13,000 peoples in the world. 6,850 of them have fewer than 2% evangelical Christians. 1,000, this is the more important number, 1,568 are unengaged.

You know what that means? No Christians, no missionary. If you think, if you've bought into the weird notion, we don't need a sin anymore, just let local people do the evangelism. There aren't any local people.

There aren't any local Christians in 1,568 unengaged people groups. That should not be. Consider the global church.

Not the American church, we're just gone probably. But the church in Asia, the church in Africa, the church in South America. Why haven't we, with all this knowledge and all this wealth of ours, sent missionaries to 1,568 unengaged people groups? I'll tell you one of the reasons why.

It's got nothing to do with money. Except everything. Not in the way you think.

There is not one single people group unreached because of a lack of money. It's because we have plenty of money while they're not reached. That's why.

Contrary to what the prosperity gospel teaches, wealth is not usually a blessing. It's a curse. Almost always.

Hear my words carefully. Wealth possessed in the bank and in the portfolio is usually a curse. Usually a curse.

Almost always a curse. Not a blessing. Contrary to what the prosperity teachers are trying to say and thus bringing a curse upon millions.

Jesus said it so plainly. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Brothers and sisters, a camel can't go through the eye of a needle.

He's calling attention to the massive dangers of wealth, accumulated wealth. Wealth is mortal danger. It does not make you, me generous.

Wealth makes nobody generous. It makes you buy more stuff. That's what it does.

And it numbs your conscience in the process because you have to constantly tell yourself, it really is in sync with the Calvary Road. It really is in sync with the Calvary Road. It really is in sync with the Calvary Road.

And the more you preach that to yourself, the number and number and number your conscience becomes until you can do things you never thought you would even lie. Listen, this is a word from God through Paul in 1st Timothy 6. Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils.

It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. And if you're alert, they pierce thousands of others with them. Those who desire to be rich are suicidal.

The reason we're not in 1,568 unengaged people groups is not that we don't have enough money. It's that we have too much. And it's all stored up for ourselves.

And it's killing us. Not the church. Of course we've got bills to pay.

It's not the issue. It's spiritual issues. It's killing us.

It's killing our hearts. It's killing our consciences. It's killing our kids.

It's not the lack of money. It's the presence of money. Because we have so much.

The comforts of the West have made us soft, cautious, fearful, indulgent, self-protecting. Instead of tough, risk-taking, bold, self-controlled, self-sacrificing. When prosperity teachers fly their personal jets to the two-thirds world, get out, hold a 50,000-person assembly, and tell them that if they believe in Jesus, they'll get rich, and get on their jets and go home, they're not doing missions.

They're destroying missions. You don't want to be a part of that. So where do they come from? Where do these strange people come from? There's so few of them.

Looks like a lot when you parade them across. But we need maybe two times 1,568. Plus, plus, plus.

Where do they come from? Well, they don't come from the prosperity gospel. The only... No, that's an overstatement. Let's be careful.

Most of the peoples that are left to be engaged are in very dangerous places. Places where grandparents get upset if you take your kids. Not this grandparent.

Those with the mindset of the prosperity gospel will never go there, and stay, and die. There's only one kind of people that are going to go there. Those with the mind of Christ.

Who came into the world not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. And then turned around and said to these ordinary folks, fishermen by and large, As the Father has sent me, so send I you. For not called to get rich, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

Because that's the sending. More so today than ever, and it's always been that way. So where do they come from? This is not natural.

We have dozens of these folks serving in places. There is no explanation for their being there. None.

They're just crazy. Unless they have been called out of darkness into a marvelous light. And they see darkness everywhere.

And they want to go. Just shine for a while. Shine for a while.

For Jesus, and His glory, and their salvation. Well, where do they come from? The answer is really here in verse 9, isn't it? You are chosen that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. So, let's just try to imagine how it's happening right now in these eight services.

How is it happening now? It goes something like this. And I can't begin to limit it to this. It's just in general.

A person who's going to wind up on the mission field reads this verse. And when they read the words that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light, they feel something. They feel, I once was in hopeless darkness.

They feel and they know that God sovereignly, irresistibly, supernaturally, like He did for Lazarus, called them out of that darkness into a light, eternal life. They look at the light in which they stand, the light of hope, the light of life, the light of forgiveness, the light of acceptance, the light of justification. They look at that light and it is marvelous to them.

Is it marvelous to you? Should it be marvelous to all of us? It is marvelous to them. It is a marvel. Jesus Christ dying for sinners all over the world, rising from the dead, sending His almighty Holy Spirit to build His church is a marvel to them.

It's just a marvel. And then, that's all of us so far, and then they hear about the nations. They read, they're in a small group, they're in a service, they hear about the nations somehow, and something happens.

It all goes, and they know, can't stay, I gotta go. Let's pray. Father, I ask that You would come upon them right now with a clarifying confirmation of Your sweet call in their lives.

Make them sure, and then bring over the next weeks and days, maybe years, more clarity about the time and the place, the form of ministry. But God above all, show them the marvel of the Christ in whom they stand. So that wherever they are with us, they might declare His excellences in word and deed.

In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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