

Editorial: Missions as a Display of God's Glory

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In the evangelical church we talk much about the Great Commission and the need for missions, usually tied to statistics regarding human need. Unfortunately, though, we often do not focus on what is central in missions—the utter centrality of the name and glory of our great triune God. As with everything in Scripture and Christian theology, it should not surprise us that the doctrine of God is most important. From Genesis to Revelation, our great God is the primary actor, the Lord of all, and, as such, he is central to everything (see Rom 11:33-36). This is *his* universe, not ours; he is concerned primarily about *his* glory, not ours (Isa 42:8). It is *his* name and character that we have sinned against (Rom 3:23), and in his gracious choice to save human beings, it is *he* who receives all praise, adoration, and worship (Eph 1:4-6). No doubt, we are the beneficiaries of his gracious action in our Lord Jesus as he has poured out his grace upon us, but he has brought about our redemption in order that “all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (John 5:23 NIV) and “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11 NIV). Even in the judgment of those who stand outside of Christ, God will receive all praise and honor since he has not compromised his own holy name, character, and glory.

This point is clearly seen in the Great Commission itself (Matt 28:18-20) since,

in the end, it is more about the glory and supremacy of our Lord Jesus than about us. To see this, it is imperative to establish the context of this crucial redemptive-historical event. Here we are presented with the risen Lord, who not only has all authority by virtue of who he is (John 1:1-3; Phil 2:6; Heb 1:3), but also now, by virtue of what he has accomplished in his triumphant cross-work (see Rom 1:2-4; Phil 2:9-11), has been given all authority from his Father as God's own sovereign mediatorial King. Jesus the Christ, who inaugurated the kingdom in his coming, has now won victory over all his enemies—including sin, death, and Satan—all of which attempt to rob God of the glory due his name. It is from this posture of authority that the risen Lord commands and impels his followers forward, to go and make disciples of all the nations—a command that brings to fulfillment the promises made to Abraham many years ago (see Gen 12:1-3) and that anticipates the climactic consummation of all of God's purposes in the new heaven and new earth (see Rev 21-22). But notice: At the heart of the Great Commission is the announcement of the triumph of our sovereign Redeemer-King. Indeed, it is the proclamation of the victory of our triune God who has fulfilled his promise to make all things right by reversing the disastrous consequences of Adam's fall and to bring about a new creation that includes within it the salvation of his people—from the nations—who will forever proclaim his

glory, honor, and fame.

When we take seriously this overall, God-centered perspective mediated through Christ and proclaimed by the power of the Spirit, we begin to see the centrality of God in missions. Our missionary God takes the initiative in grace and power to defeat all that stands against his glory and honor. Missions, in the end, has as its focus *this* God, and it has as its *ultimate* motivation nothing less than to see the name and glory of God spread throughout the earth and among the nations because that is his right and due. That is why, for the church, there is no greater task we can engage in than the proclamation and spread of the gospel to the nations. Not only is it *not* optional given our Lord's command, but it also must be our delight and all-consuming passion to see our great God's glory displayed in the salvation of the lost and in the disciple-making of the nations.

With that said, it must be acknowledged, though, that the task of fulfilling our mission-calling is not always easy. There are many facets of it that must be carefully considered. In this edition, it is our privilege to reflect upon some of these important facets in both the articles and Forum selections. What unites our contributors, whether they are reflecting upon the biblical basis for missions or some of the very important theological and practical issues that we face as we do missions, is the God-centered nature of our missions-calling. Robert Plummer and Andreas Köstenberger begin our reflections by helping us think through afresh the biblical basis for missions by looking at the Great Commission and John's Gospel respectively. Both conclude that missions is not only necessary for the church, but also, particularly as seen

in John's Gospel, it is at the heart of what God himself is doing in the world in the giving of his Son.

Chuck Lawless then turns our focus to the very important theological and practical issue of spiritual warfare and missions, especially in light of the attention it has received in missiological literature. He works through biblical data as well as recent opinion on the subject and offers some very helpful and wise reflections. Ben Merkle tackles another significant facet of missions by calling us back to the Apostle Paul's example, both in terms of proclamation and, specifically, the training of future generations through theological education—something that we must think through carefully if we are going to see the church reproduce with missions-minded people. David Sills focuses our attention on the crucial issue of communicating the gospel in cultures other than our own by utilizing some of the tools of intercultural communication. And lastly, John Piper, an individual and pastor known for his commitment to missions, gives us a powerful sermon focusing on the God-centered nature of our missions-calling before the Lord. As always, our Forum essays, in a diverse way, round out our discussion by giving us practical advice and wisdom, calling each one of us to be faithful in carrying out the Great Commission today.

It is my prayer that this edition of *SBJT* will challenge each one of us to renew our commitment to glorify God in the proclamation of the gospel—not only to see many people come under the saving reign of our Lord Jesus Christ—but even more, to see God glorified in the salvation of many people from every tribe, nation, and tongue, because he and he alone is worthy.