“Let the Nations Be Glad!”

John Piper is the pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is a well-known Calvinist, Christian hedonist, author, and fervent supporter of global missions. His life’s cry is to "spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ." He is noted for coining the phrase “God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him,” the battle cry of Christian hedonism. In *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, John Piper’s goal is to present a biblical foundation for a correct Missiology that is accessible and readable for seminary and college students, missionaries, pastors, laymen, and people of all backgrounds and statuses in life. He expounds upon this is seven chapters: the Supremacy of God in Missions through Worship, the Supremacy of God in Missions through Prayer, the Supremacy of God in Missions through Suffering, the Supremacy of Christ as the Conscious Focus of all Saving Faith, the Supremacy of God among “All the Nations,” Jonathon Edwards’s on the Unity of Motives for World Missions, and the Inner Simplicity and Outer Freedom of Worldwide Worship.

In his first chapter, John Piper asserts that Missions are not the goal or the end of the Church. He says:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever…(17)

Worship is the fuel and goal of Missions (Psa. 9:2; 67:3-4; 97:1; 104:34). Mr. Piper correctly asserts that “Missions begins and ends in worship” (17). What is worship one might ask? Worship is the experience of finding oneself fully satisfied in the person and attributes of God. Mr. Piper effectively shows that God’s zeal for His glory is the ultimate drive behind all things concerning creation, redemption, and missions.

The second chapter concerns the role of prayer in the mission of the Church. Piper says life is war so prayer is a wartime walkie talkie. He says that “Prayer is the communication with headquarters by which the weapons of warfare are deployed according to the will of God” (48). He says prayer malfunctions half the time because we use our wartime walkie talkies as a
domestic intercoms. Until we see life as an all-out war, prayer will be mundane for us. He makes the point that prayer is where we get the power for Missions, but prayer itself is not the work of Missions. The work of Missions is the faithful preaching the true Gospel to dead sinners and saints alike (Acts 4:31; Rom. 10:13-14,17; Eph. 6:17-18). We pray for boldness...God grants boldness to preach the Word...the Word goes out...it never fails...sinners are converted and savoring the pleasures of knowing God...God is glorified.

The third chapters discusses the place of suffering in the spread and advance of the Gospel. Persecution and suffering are a privilege and a promise for the believer who is out preaching the offensive message of the cross. After all, Jesus assured his followers that they would suffer for the sake of the Gospel (Mark 8:31; Luke 17:25; John 15:20). John Piper asks the tough yet crucial question of “Does His suffering for us mean we escape suffering?” (76). No. He says “The answer is that Christ died for us so that we would not have to die for sin, not so that we would not have to die for others” (78). Piper gives six biblical reasons why God appoints (not allows or permits) suffering for his servants: suffering deepens faith and holiness, suffering makes your cup increase, suffering is the price of making others bold, suffering fills up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions, suffering enforces the missionary command to go, and the supremacy of Christ is manifest in suffering. He closes the section of the books with “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. And the supremacy of that glory shines most brightly when the satisfaction that we have in Him endures in spite of suffering and pain in the mission of love” (107).

“The Supremacy of Christ as the Conscious Focus of All Saving Faith” concerns itself with three very important questions in regards to Missions: Will anyone experience eternal conscious torment under God’s wrath?, Is the work of Christ necessary?, and Is conscious faith in Christ Necessary?. Piper says that “biblical answers to these three questions are crucial because in each case a negative answer would seem to cut a nerve of urgency in the missionary cause” (115). Using Scripture, Piper emphatically answers a resounding “yes” to each proposed question and upholds and urgency of the missionary mandate. Charles Hodge is right that “the solemn question, implied in the language of the apostle, how can they believe without a preacher? Should sound day and night in the ears of the Church” (154). Piper also effectively shows in the next chapter that the goal of the Church is to make disciples of all nations or ,in missiological language, reach all people groups with the Gospel.
In the next chapter, John Piper presents the biblical link between a passion for God’s supremacy and a compassion for men’s soul. Drawing heavily on his favorite theologian Jonathon Edwards, Piper conveys the message that the ultimate problem addressed by missions is that God’s glory is dishonored among the peoples of the world. He says that “this is the ultimate evil and ultimate outrage of the universe“ (206). He passionately cries that:

The infinite, all-glorious Creator of the universe, by whom and for whom all things exist (Rom. 11:36) – who holds every person’s life in being at every moment (Acts 17:25) – is disregarded, disbelieved, disobeyed, and dishonored by everybody in the world. That is the ultimate outrage of the universe (206).

How does compassion for the sinner about to perish in the eternal fires of Hell relate to a passion for God’s glory? Again, Piper pulls from the repertoire of the great Jonathon Edwards. Edwards gives four main points in linking these two biblical facts: compassion pursues the rescue of perishing sinners, fear of Hell by itself does not save anyone, Therefore, compassion must not merely warn people about the pains of going to Hell but also lure people to the pleasures of knowing Christ, and it is precisely this satisfaction in Christ himself that magnifies Christ and glorifies God. Piper’s last chapter of the book explains the role and experience of worship under the old and new covenants.

*Let the Nations be Glad!* presents a wonderful exposition of biblical Missiology with passion and conviction. I enjoyed reading this book because it very faithfully presented the biblical grounds for joyful missions that seek to honor and exalt the name of Christ. Mr. Piper did an excellent job of stirring my heart to deeper praise and adoration for Christ’s supremacy in all the nations.

The ultimate goal of God in all of history is to uphold and display his glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. His goal is the gladness of his people, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Delight is a higher tribute than duty. The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy his glory forever. Since his glory is magnified most in the God-centered passions of his joyful people, God's self-exaltation and our jubilation are one. The greatest news in all the world is that God's ultimate aim to be glorified and man's aim to be satisfied are not at odds (231).

What wonderful news for lovers of God’s glory and perishing men who need to desperately hear
the good news of salvation through Christ’s atoning work at Golgotha!