**Core Seminar - Missions: Week 2**

**The Glory of God and the Goal of Creation: A Biblical Theology of Missions[[1]](#footnote-0)**

**January 13, 2022**

**Main idea:**“God blessing the nations through Christ.”

**Class goals:** Lord willing, by better understanding the storyline of Scripture, the class will better understand the basis for missions rooted in the central reality of God’s redemptive mission throughout history.

**Introduction**

Last week we talked about the goal for missions and considered what God’s motivation and our motivation is–God’s glory. Now there are a lot of ways to bring God glory: we glorify God by faithfulness in our daily lives, in working unto him, by submitting to his commandments, and by loving others. So what does *missions* have to do with God’s glory? Is it a major part of God’s purpose to glorify himself, or just one tangential aspect of it? How important is “missions” to God’s purpose in creation and redemption?

Today we are going to trace that theme of “God’s glory” in order to understand how the idea of “missions” fits into God’s plan to bring Himself glory in His creation.

To do that, we want to draw on what is referred to as “Biblical Theology.” What is Biblical Theology? Simply put, it’s tracing a theme or idea through all of Scripture. It’s useful to trace themes in this way, progressively, in order to put the pieces of the storyline of the Bible together. And that’s what we want to do for the rest of our time this morning. And the theme that we want to trace is this: ‘What is God doing in the world?’ Or to put it more sharply, ‘what is the purpose or goal of creation?’ In other words, what is the mission of God?

## 

→ **Discussion Question:** What answers have you heard to this question? How have you heard the purpose of creation described?

## 

## The Goal of Creation

The closest thing we get to a thesis statement for creation, I believe, is in Numbers 14. Turn with me in your Bibles to Numbers 14.

Do you remember this episode? God has delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt, he’s given them his law, and is leading them toward the Promised Land. But then the people of Israel rebel against the Lord and complain against him, saying in verse 4: “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” In response the LORD says to Moses in verse 12: “I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.” But then you have this amazing prayer of Moses, interceding to the LORD on their behalf, appealing to God’s glory and name as the basis of keeping his covenant. And God responds in verse 20 by forgiving the people but also promising judgment on the rebellious generation:

21 Then the Lord said, “I have pardoned, according to your word. 21 But truly, as I live, *and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*, 22 none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice (Num. 14:19-21).

Now we know from Hebrews 6 that when people make an oath, they “swear by something greater than themselves… So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath” (Heb. 6:16-18). What two things does the LORD swear by when he makes this promise? *“As I live”* and “*As all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.*”

Like I said, this is as close as you get to a thesis statement in the Bible. As certain as it is that the LORD will live, it is certain that “*all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord*.” In fact, this is so sure, that the Lord swears by it!

Another place we see this same theme is Habbakuk 2:14:

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

In a word, *the mission of God is to fill the earth with his glory.* That’s what God is doing in the world, from Creation to Consummation, God is fashioning a world that displays his glory.

I love how Jonathan Edwards puts it:

“The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse towards whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense fountain of condescension, love, and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified.”[[2]](#footnote-1)

With this in mind, I want to unpack this theme under **four headings: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation**. After that I’ll have a few points of application about how this applies to missions.

# 

# 1. Creation: The King Establishes His Kingdom

The story of the Bible starts with the all-powerful, uncreated, only God, creating a place of habitable order out of chaos by true speech. This is fundamental. The Bible presents God as the one and only Creator and Sustainer of everything that exists. Everything belongs to him.

And if you read Genesis 1 carefully, you see that Creation is marked by alternating stages of **“forming” and “filling.”** The first three Days are marked by God’s “forming” acts of creating the light (v. 3), the sky (v. 6), the land & seas (v. 9), and vegetation (v. 11). The next three days are marked by God’s filling the now habitable order with all manner of created things: the sun, moon, and stars (v. 14), the birds and fish (v. 20), animals (v. 24), and last of all, as the crown of his creation, God forms man (v. 26).

And God creates man, not simply *in* His image, but *as* His image. This is really important: It’s not that God has some image out there that we are replicas of—no God is an invisible Spirit who cannot be seen. We are created to be *that* image. How is the created world supposed to know what God is like? We’re the display.

But here’s the twist: Whereas on the other days, God both forms and fills, when it comes to man, God does the *forming* and leaves it up to man to do the *filling*. Look at Genesis 1:28:

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and **fill** the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Gen. 1:28)

God could have just created 10 billion Adam and Eves and distributed them throughout the Earth to reflect his glory, but he didn’t do that. He gave THEM the mission of filling creation with image-bearers!

**Illustration:** Have you ever seen a picture of the earth from space at night? Clusters of light, here and there, showing the presence of cities? That is what God was doing in creation: planting mankind as lights on a dark planet, to multiply and fill the earth, so that the whole earth and the entire universe would radiate with his glory, refracted through the lives of those made in His image.

What a privilege. What a responsibility! To *image* and reflect the glory of God!

But this isn’t the world we recognize, is it? We read Genesis 1 and immediately know that something has gone wrong. This brings us to the next part of the story: The Fall: Rebellion in the Kingdom.

→ **Discussion Question:** Why does beginning with the doctrine of creation matter for missions? (God is the only God, creator of everyone).

# 2. Fall: Rebellion in the Kingdom

In Genesis chapter three, we are introduced to the villain of the Bible’s story–a malevolent force, a supernatural intelligence named Satan–who hates God. He hates the idea of God being glorified and he will stop at nothing to thwart God’s plan for creation. To do this, he plants an insurgency in God’s kingdom.

He does this in Genesis 3 by taking the form of a serpent and tempting them to seize power and rule the earth on their own terms rather than God’s. To make themselves, not God, the ultimate source of right and wrong, good and bad, true and false.

And you know the story—Adam and Eve eat the fruit and plunge the whole world into misery and death. They continue to fill the earth through childbearing, *but as you read Genesis, rather than filling the earth with images of God’s glory, they fill the earth with images of Satan*.

Yes, they are still image-bearers of God (Gen. 9:6), but that image has been marred. Yes, the earth is filled, not with the glory of God, but with murderers like Cain and Lamech.

So much so that when God looks on the earth in Genesis 6:5, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

The question is: How would a good God respond to his creatures who had turned away from the purpose for which they were made? How would God respond to this insurgency within his own kingdom?

# 

# 3. Redemption: The King Pursues His People

And really, I want to talk about this point under three subheadings, Redemption Initiated, Redemption Accomplished, and Redemption Proclaimed. Redemption is *initiated* in the Old Testament, Redemption is *accomplished* through Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, and Redemption is *proclaimed* nowuntil Christ returns.

## 

## a) Redemption Initiated

Immediately after their rebellion God responds with a promise of deliverance—Genesis 3:15—and this promise will shape the rest of the storyline of the Bible. Look at what God promises, this is God speaking to Satan:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel” **(Gen. 3:15).**

You see what is happening here: Satan has launched a successful insurgency that has taken the entire human race under his sway. But it is now from within this rebellious human race that God promises to initiate his own counter-insurgency! This counter-insurgency will ***re****verse* the effects of sin, ***re****store* mankind to a relationship with Him, and ***re****capitulate* God’s purpose of creation to fill the earth with his glory. **(Repeat)**

The rest of the story of the Old Testament, in a sense, is tracing this promised “offspring,” this “seed,” this future “son” who will conquer Satan and restore God’s kingdom.

You catch a glimpse of the *longing* for the promised seed when Lamech, in Genesis 5, names his son Noah, which sounds like the Hebrew word for ‘rest,’ saying perhaps “this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands” (Gen. 5:29). But it isn’t until Genesis 12 that the promise is further specified. Look at Genesis 12:1-3:

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, *so that you will be a blessing*. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*. (Gen. 12:1-3)

Do you hear the echoes of Genesis 1 in this language of ‘blessing’? See sin had brought God’s curse upon the world. Up until Genesis 12, there are five curses recorded:

1. God cursed the serpent (3:14).

2. God cursed the ground (3:17)

3. Cain was cursed (4:11)

4. Lamech refers to the cursed ground (5:29)

5. Noah cursed Canaan (9:25).

But here in these verses, we see five promises to bless, overcoming the previous curses!

God’s plan is not merely promising to call and bless Abraham. His purpose in blessing Abraham is that *“all peoples* on earth will be blessed through you.” **As God formed Adam and Eve and charged them with *filling* the earth, God here is promising to *form* a people through Abraham that will bring his blessing to the whole earth.** This is always what God is doing: He’s *blessing* so that we’ll be a *blessing*.

This promise–called the Abrahamic Covenant–really becomes the framework for God’s dealing with humanity for the rest of biblical history:

**God is *creating a people (Israel), through whom he will send the promise seed (Gen. 3:15), in order to bless the nations (Gen. 12), so that the earth will be filled with his glory (Num. 14:21).***

So from Genesis onward, you can trace this theme of a “Son” who will redeem his people and bless the world. This promise first given to Abraham in Genesis 12, is then repeated to Isaac, then to Jacob, then you expect the promise to go to Joseph, but it goes to Judah instead, and, so-forth and so-on, generation after generation until David. In **2 Sam. 7:12-16** God promises King David that this promised offspring’s reign will last *forever*:

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’”

But all along the way–I want you to see this–the focus of sending this *seed is always to fulfill God’s promise* *by blessing the nations*. So Psalm 45, which is a Psalm composed by the Sons of Korah, to praise this *seed* of David, says in verse 17: “*I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever*” (Psalm 45:17). So the blessing of the nations is wrapped up in the promise of this coming king!

Or take Isaiah 2:2-3, where in the midst of judgment on Israel, God links the future day of the Davidic King’s eternal reign with the blessing of the nations:

It shall come to pass in the latter days

that the mountain of the house of the LORD

shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be lifted up above the hills;

and all the nations shall flow to it,

and many peoples shall come, and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

So to recap–*Throughout the Old Testament God is promising to fill the earth with his glory, by creating a people, through whom he will send a promised son, who will bless the nations.*

The question–that sounds with increasing intensity and desperation–from David’s reign in 1000 BC to Judah’s exile in 586 BC– is when and how will this “Son” come?

## b) Redemption Accomplished

Have you ever wondered why the New Testament opens, in Matthew chapter one, with a Genealogy? It’s because it is picking up this promise of the Seed of the Woman, the Son of David, to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of these promises!

This is where the Bible’s story reaches its climax. Jesus is God the Son incarnate: the promised Seed of the Woman and Son of David. As Satan once used one man to turn all men against God; Jesus became a man to turn mankind back to God. *Jesus is God’s counter-insurgency within Satan’s insurgency!*

Yet rather than receiving him as their rightful king and Lord, how do God’s people respond to God’s arrival?

“He came unto his own, but his own people did not receive him.”

But what Satan thought would be the end of God’s plan to redeem mankind accomplished the very opposite. By his perfect life, death, and resurrection, Jesus defeated the power of death and hell, effectively ending Satan’s tyrannical reign. By dying as a substitutionary sacrifice in our place, Jesus made a way for mankind to be restored to a right relationship with God.

And this brings us to the third point: redemption proclaimed.

## 

## c) Redemption Proclaimed

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he took his seat at God’s right hand, and as the ruler of the universe, the coronated king pours out the Holy Spirit as the spoils of his victory, and commands his disciples to spread the news of his kingdom. That’s what he commands them in Matthew 28:18-20:

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

This mission, that God has entrusted, not to Israel, but to the church, is simply the recapitulation of God’s original plan for creation! To fill the earth with now-restored, Spirit-filled, image bearers of God, by baptizing them into local churches that teach them to obey everything Christ has commanded. That’s what the Great Commission is—to make disciples of all nations and thereby fill the earth with the glory of God! That’s why all throughout the book of Acts we see the language of multiplication:

“The word of God continued to **increase**, and the number of the disciples **multiplied** greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7).

**“**But the word of God **increased** and **multiplied**.” (Acts 12:24).

The two words used here for “increase” and “multiply” are the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew words “be fruitful and multiply.” And as God originally blessed Adam and Eve so that they could bless the world by filling it, God has blessed believers with his Holy Spirit, so that we would bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Through Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the New Creation has dawned. And as Spirit-filled, sons of the King, we can once again fulfill our created purpose of multiplying the earth with image bearers who reflect God’s glory!

Brothers and sisters, this is our mission and purpose in the world. This is the purpose of our lives! To increasingly *image* our creator, as Christ *re*-forms us by his Spirit, and to share the good news of Christ’s victory with others. We are to be fruitful and multiply as we share the Good News of Christ’s *in*-breaking reign with the world around us!

And that brings us to the final part of the story.

# 4. Consummation: The Return of the King

All of history is straining ahead towards the day that Jesus returns as the victorious king. On that day, King Jesus will return bodily to earth to reign forever and restore all things. The future that the Bible promises is nothing less than the complete and total restoration of God’s original creation.

On that day, Jesus will personally answer the prayer that he taught us to pray:

Your kingdom come!

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

On that day, Isaiah’s prophecy will come true, and

6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,

and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,

and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;

and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze;

their young shall lie down together;

and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,

and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

9 They shall not hurt or destroy

in all my holy mountain;

*for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord*

*as the waters cover the sea.* (Isaiah 11:6-9)

And on that day, the promise of Numbers 14:21 will be fulfilled: “the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.”

But friends that’s not the end of the story. That’s the *beginning* of the real story. The most true story.

The question for us is–is this your story? Is this the story that informs and animates your life? Or are you living according to another story? A *smaller* story?

As we turn to ask how all this applies to missions, that’s my first application.

# How does this apply to missions?

## 1. Let the story of the Bible shape the story of your life.

What lesser goals are you living for? What smaller dreams distract you from the purpose for which God has made you? Immerse yourself in the story of the Bible until it informs and infuses every aspect of your life.

## 

## 2. Rest in the fact that God’s mission will not fail.

God has sworn it. He has promised it. The good news of the kingdom will be preached to every tribe, tongue, and nation. So we should go with urgency while resting in his promises.

## 

## 3. Recognize the centrality of the local church in God’s mission.

If God’s eschatological purpose is to fill the earth with his glory, where is God’s glory seen now? Where do we look to see the glory of the invisible God on display in the midst of brokenness, and suffering, and sin? The local church. The local church, with its covenanted community of redeemed sinners, is a colony of heaven: a truly yet imperfectly displaying God’s glory to the onlooking world.

**Conclusion**

Have you ever been far away from the city-lights on a cloudless night and seen the stars in all their splendor? I remember driving with a friend through the Shenandoah Valley at night looking for our camping site. At one point, we stopped and got out of the car and we were amazed by the brightness and clarity of the stars. I don’t know if I’ve ever seen them as bright and clear as that night. Philippians 2:15 envisions something similar for the church. There Paul calls the Christians in Philippi to be “blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation among whom you shine as stars in the universe.” The city of Philippi was the dark canvas on which those Christians were called to be the diamonds of light, until the light of the gospel reaches every tribe, tongue, and nation, and the earth finally and fully is filled with the glory of the Lord.

Let’s pray.

**FAQs:**

* What about those in the Old Testament who never heard the good news about Jesus?
  + 1. Scripture is clear that God has sufficiently revealed himself that all people everywhere are without excuse (Psalm 19; Romans 1).
  + 2. Faith in God’s promises has always been the basis of salvation, whether in the OT or NT. (Rom. 4)
  + 3. In the OT you see a foreshadow of gentile inclusion: Rahab, Ruth, etc.
  + 4. Paul calls this a “mystery” long-hidden but more revealed: that the Gentiles would be included as God’s people before the final judgment (see Eph. 3).
  + 5. If people in the OT, or people who have never heard the gospel today for that matter, were not going to be judged, there would be no motivation for Jesus’s missionary command! (Romans 10:9).
  + 6. We need to trust God’s judgments and leave it to him. “Will not the God of all the earth so what is right?”

1. Adapted from Caleb Morell’s talk, “One Story–Understanding the Storyline of the Bible (December 31, 2018). Used with author’s permission. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Jonathan Edwards, “The Church’s Marriage To Her Sons, And To Her God,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 25, Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758. Ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (WJE Online Vol. 25), 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)